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Cover picture

Woodstock, Hunter Valley, NSW, reproduced from *Life in Australia*, the Australian way of life depicted by thirty-eight of Australia's leading photographers, which was published by Golden Press in 1971.

Measuring up to the age and place

Howard Jacobson on recent Australian fiction, and a precarious victory of boldness over "whimsy and minimalism".

Yes, Patrick White is modern; but is he adequate? And how can a man adequately interpret the activity of his age when he is not in sympathy with it? Think of the varied, the abundant, the wide spectacle of Australian life of his day; think of its fulness of occupation, its energy of effort. From these Patrick White withdraws himself, and bids his disciples to withdraw themselves... but there is no peace, no cheerfulness for him either in the world from which he comes, or in the solitude to which he goes. With stern effort, with gloomy despair, he seems to rivet his eyes on the elementary reality, the naked framework of the world, because the world in its fulness and movement is too exciting a spectacle for his discomposed brain... Patrick White is, therefore, overstrained, gloom-weighted, morbid; and he who is morbid is no adequate interpreter of his age.

Of course, no one actually wrote that about Patrick White. The words are Matthew Arnold's and the gloomy withdrawer he is properly describing is Lucretius. Which therefore means that we are in ancient Rome, not contemporary Australia. But the transposition is not fantastical. "Life in Australia seemed to be for many people pretty deadly dull", Patrick White himself said in an interview in *Southerly* in 1972; "I have tried to convey a splendour, a transcendence, which is also there above human realities." For transcendence read naked framework, making allowances for spiritual conceit; for life in Australia seeming to be pretty deadly dull read gloom-weighted and morbid, recalling the rough treatment meted out in White's fiction and non-fiction to those who can find their way, or take their pleasures, in the material world.

This is not to be an article about Patrick White. But such is the long shadow he has cast over modern Australian writing that even a critic must pass through it before he finds the light. In thinking of Patrick White as Lucretius, the issue is not the quality of his genius but the nature of his influence, how far other writers have learnt from him to be unimpressed - as it were on principle; as a sign of their writerly good faith - by the activity of their age. How not to have the stomach for it.

For if Patrick White fits the bill as Lucretius, Australia surely does no worse a job of standing in for Rome. We might go further and insist



Maude Winifred Sherwood's watercolour "William goes to Work (Melbourne)" was sold for £3,600 at Christie's sale of topographical pictures on October 29.

that variety and abundance, fullness of occupation and energy of effort - the effort to enjoy no less than the energy to strive - are only the start of what constitutes the Australian "spectacle" today. This is not the place to extend the list. Suffice it to say that it is not just the coming birthday party that can explain the intense interest Australia is taking in itself right now, let alone the fascination it continues to hold for distant continents. Robert Hughes's book *The Fatal Shore* (reviewed in the TLS, January 23) might owe its original conception and timing to that event, without necessarily being compromised by it; but the other significant Australian non-fiction epic of recent years - John Bryson's *Evil Angels* (1986), chronicling

as a saga of the national conscience the aftermath of Azaria Chamberlain's death - is ripped from the very belly of the beast, raw meat never intended for any festive kebab.

Both those books, however much one might miss in them the irresponsibility and improvisational flair of the novelist, none the less threaten to wrest the high ground of imaginative interpretation from Australian writers of fiction. They enclose the events of the last 200 years like a pair of proprietorial brackets, keeping out those who would dip their toes only gingerly into the great Australian mythology. To return to Arnold's challenging concept of "adequacy", they reinforce the argument that there is a tumultuous society out there, or,

if you would prefer, *in* there, which Australian writers are obliged to be adequate to.

And if one were to go only on the evidence of the short Australian fiction published recently, one would conclude that they aren't rising with much ardour to that challenge. Just why a country so vast should specialize in stories so small is a mystery it is not within the scope of this review to explore. The case usually made for their proliferation finds the form originating in an isolated people's hunger for news, for word of home or simply somewhere else, which would be satisfied at last by bush gossip, yarns, exaggerations, droll fantasies spun at the bar or around a camp-fire by expertly laconic (where, after all, was the hurry?) bullshit artists. Which lineage would be convincing if the child showed some trace of its grandparents' vitality. As it is, there is not much that reminds one of basic convivial narration in most modern Australian short stories; little of the competence required to engage the attention of a noisy gathering; and small taste for the ordinary vulgarity and invention that spices successful gossip. "My mother was a magger", is the opening line of Carmel Bird's *The Woodpecker Toy Fact*, but the word magger has to be asterisked - "The magpie is the scandalmonger of the woods. The verb 'to mag' meaning 'to gossip' derives from magpie" - thereby distancing us at once from those earlier arts and preparing us for their metamorphosis, their academic cutification into that mock child-wise fantasizing which is the last resort of the awkward. "One day I am going to know everything about everything... I will know what sorrow is made from, what constitutes joy. I will have conversations with the sage of Zurich, after-noon tea with Chagall in his garden..."

Try making a story-stuffed outstation ring to that. Whimsy, especially scorpion-whimsy with a deadly little sting in its tail, has been given a new currency by the success of Elizabeth Jolley's sinisterly spinsterly novels, and the Australian short story - invariably supported by a grant and then applauded by a prize - is looking decidedly peakish in the face of its advance. Anyone anxious for its health, therefore, should welcome such signs of vigour as are to be found, for example, in Angelo Loukakis's *Vernacular Dreams*. No gossip-monger webs of private fantasy in this volume. Loukakis's tales tell mainly of the disappoint-

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ments of urban migrant Australia: Neil Munro-poulos having to work in a city store; Alfio Biondi wanting to make it as a photographer but ending up leading cameras for perverts at a peep-show; Steve, the "dumb ethnic", throwing his first ever uni party and watching it all go wrong. Shame and humiliation in every case.

For these, for insults real or imagined, for those impulsive rushes of hope or warmth which are so likely to be misplaced in an alien culture, Loukakakis has a good ear. Things go wrong, as they often do in Australian realistic writing, in the vicinity of that word "vernacular". When the sad figures who lope through these stories experience a moment of pleasure they are "ripped"; their new shoes cost "top dollar"; they "suss things out" (for more usually they don't), get "given the shits" easily and are as much victims of patois as anything else. Which is no doubt precisely Mr Loukakakis's point. But the strategy of creating characters through the banality of their own language merely leaves us in an uncomfortable collision with the camera-shy author, we know something about these poor no-hopers which they have no inkling of themselves. And we can scarcely be more impressed either, by the time we've finished, with the vitality of Australian English. A language for tawdry dreams it seems, for pathetic enthusiasms and misdirected verve and approximate moralities.

Why are Australian writers so vexed by the idiomatic resources of their own language? Why, unlike say the Americans, do they have so little linguistic amour propre?

Gerald Murnane's *Landscape with Landscape* is free of the problem of deciding on a language in which to have his characters converse or think, because no one, apart from the brooding central presence we are warned not to confuse with the author, is permitted to do either. The title of the collection renders fairly the inescapably monomaniacal nature of the enterprise: six field and obsessive parts woven into one foid and obsessive whole, ending in the forlorn realization that "I have been moving all my life in a north-east direction at an average velocity of 0.75 kilometres per year." Or, put another way, "(I . . .)" - brackets matter to Gerald Murnane - "(I . . .)" had never been anywhere else; my hair was turning grey and I had never crossed the borders of the State of Victoria."

That the author can keep us interested in what might thus appear to be a rather parochial problem is a tribute to his fidelity to the obsession. This might not be a book which offers to tackle the wide spectacle of Australian life, but in a curious kind of way simply not being able to is precisely its subject, and so in an even more curious kind of way it comes around, negatively so to speak, to tackling the issue of the spectacle after all. If nothing else, he acknowledges it - everything in Australia that isn't Melbourne and its environs - as a continuing reproach.

The idea of an eternally, ludicrously thwarted self, trapped for ever in a sort of mythical State of Victoria, is one a reader might easily find himself missing when he comes to Tim Winton, the wonderkind of Australian letters. Born as recently as 1960, the author of three novels and two volumes of short stories, and the recipient of a major Australian literary award for just about everything he has published, Winton likes writing about triers. He also likes writing about water. It shouldn't be too difficult to anticipate, therefore, that one of his favourite metaphors is that of the swimmer. Here's a typical ending to one of his stories:

She launched into a crawl, smacking across the tops of her arms as she had done behind the old man in the boat all those years back. She kept the hull in sight. She struck out, not invisible but strong. And she knew she could swim it all out of her; it was only a matter of time.

Though he can also be more adventurous with the form:

I can be like a machine. Like a fish, you old bitch. I can swim away.

Harder.

Go.

On.

Harder.

That body thrashed and whitened the water, shivering out, vibrating, parts shearing on, sooting white hot, and all the way down she felt young and strong and perfect in the cold darkness.

Scission and other stories is young man's literature, clearly. And not simply because of the high temperature of the sentences, still sizzling long after they've been plunged in cold water. It's the insistently positive note that proclaims youth, all that teeth-gritting, and going for it, and what's more getting there. Sometime after one's thirty-fifth birthday the idea of not getting there at all, of giving up half-way, of turning back or dropping like a stone, demands a place in one's philosophical scheme. Reading Winton's latest collection, *Minimum of Two*, can be like being told to sit up straight and pull oneself together by a keen boy scout.

There can be no doubting, though, that he can write with feeling and immediacy of the lurchings of early passion, the stresses of young marriage, the first experiences of fatherhood. Here, too, he gives no quarter to malingers. We have to be up and out there *feeling*. Shit and piss, puss, conception and delivery - yes, we must even swim in the afterbirth - these are his subjects. Pulse prose, we have to call this, thinking of the throb of life and the seeds of lentils. Fully manned and freighted, capable maybe of an arduous voyage, and captained by a boyish but ambitious skipper, Tim Winton's bark sits bobbing in home waters, waiting for the word of command. A berth

for some time in the 1990s could be worth booking.

Altogether less muscle-bound and sinewy, and altogether more seasoned too, are Helen Garner's stories. "I turn forty-one", is how the last sketch in *Postcards from Surfers* begins. A page later - Helen Garner really knows how to keep the Australian short story short - it concludes on a note of rejoicing. "This is it. I am finally on the far side of the line." *Habe Dank!*

The note of tremulous self-awareness, finely monitoring each advance or retrogression of the personality, explains the considerable success Garner's work enjoys in Australia. She speaks for a generation. Those who turned thirty in the early 1970s, who messed around with drugs a bit, who hung around with, or were themselves, musicians. And she speaks for a sex. Those who first took up arms in the struggle twenty years ago and still flash their rage today, but who are not past falling in love again, in the old sweet way:

He woke with a bright face. "I feel unblemished," he said, "when I've been with you." This is why I loved him, of course: because he talked like that, using words and phrases that most people wouldn't think of saying. "When I'm with you," he'd say, "I feel happy and free."

Such *fin de guerre* moments, though - Mills

and Boon for bohemians - are no more than lulls in the storm. Put two women together in a Helen Garner story and their eyes will meet in a confederacy of loathing the minute a man opens his mouth. Put a Helen Garner heroine next to an Australian neon lighting systems salesman and he'll regret the impulse that ever made him open up his catalogue and say such things as, "Now this one here is a real goer." To be a man is rough enough in this world. To be a salesman - ouch!

Finally, somewhere between the loving and the loathing, the stories settle into a sentimentalized though no doubt sociologically accurate stoicism. "I want a man who'll look after me and love me", says one of her women, tearfully. "Women like us", her friend replies, "don't have men like that . . . We've done something to ourselves so that men won't do it. Well - there are men who will. But we despise them." At which the first woman stops her crying. And the second goes back to strumming her ukelele.

In that same essay from which I quoted at the beginning ("On the Modern Element in Literature") Matthew Arnold cites the "banishment of the signs of war and bloodshed from the intercourse of civil life" as one of the signs we look for of an advanced civilization. It is one area where Australia fails to measure up to its ideal of classical urbanity. "I enjoy Australia", Sidney Nolan once said, "and I love being there, but it is a community which brawls more than it should." And he wasn't referring to what goes on in pubs in Humpty Do but to the temper of Australian artistic and intellectual life. For me the most interesting aspect of Garner's stories is their shell-shocked quality. If there is a "Look: I have come through" spirit about her work - "*Habe Dank!*" I am finally on the far side of the line" - it is because that is precisely what her heroine (there really is only one) has done. She has survived the fires of Melbourne and Sydney social life.

The most accomplished historian of those conflagrations over the past twenty years has been Frank Moorhouse. I hope it's not simply because he is a man that I find his stories more robust than Helen Garner's, more fully orchestrated, less reliant on the broken reed section. He, too, frequently addresses us these days from the convalescent bed - the author as cautiously ageing patient - with a thermometer clenched tightly between his teeth. "When he noticed that his libido was low while in Vienna for the first time he thought it was because he was travelling . . ." But he has a keen sense of the absurdity of the ailments of the self, and is one of the few writers in Australia who not only can make one laugh but who sees that there might be good reasons why a writer should choose to do so. It being another of those bewildering Australian paradoxes, bearing once more on the question of "adequacy", that whereas the day-by-day commerce of the country is conducted to the accompaniment of often quite intemperately inventive ribaldry and irony, its preferred literary tone is funeral. There can be few countries in the world whose literatures so comprehensively anathematize that indispensable activity of the intelligence which goes by the name of wit.

So thank goodness, especially in a year in which there has been nothing new published by Peter Carey, for Frank Moorhouse: Even for a ruminative Frank Moorhouse, brooding over just what it is that makes a landscape special, what makes a district "personal" in the story "From a Bush Log Book: Going into the Heartlands with the wrong person at Christmas", from *The Faber Book of Contemporary Australian Short Stories*, edited by Murray Ball, to be published on January 25.

Two weeks later he went to the Sassafras bush along the trail and dumped in the same place - alone. It was a trip to erase the mistake of having gone there with Della.

After a couple of days of being in the bush he realized that it was a misguided effort. He was making too much of having gone there with "the wrong person", and coming back to erase it had only more deeply inscribed it - and the inscription had been added to.

Now whenever he passed the place he would think of having gone there with the wrong person and of having attempted to erase it.

It is nicely underplayed - a little drama of modern man and his precarious freight of precious associations, holding his spirit against fading memories and a fluctuating sense of

propriety and an unyielding bush. It is as good an Australian short story as I have read, not least because of its apparently effortless transition from mere private anecdote to almost parabolic generality. A wan, worldly, whimsical parable about a peculiarly Australian wished-for honourableness of mind, a necessarily tainted spirituality which is a long way from Patrick White's spiteful rejections.

But it is to the novel, necessarily, that we must look if we are to find writers who are the equal of their age and place, adequate interpreters in the grand Arnoldian sense. Two years ago we had *Illywhacker*, a novel which seems to me to have come close indeed, as close as one has any right to expect, to meeting Arnold's prescriptions. So what has this year brought? More, at least for readers in England, by Elizabeth Jolley, naturally, with *Milk and Honey*. An apocalyptic picture of a submerged twenty-first century Melbourne - *The Sea and Summer* - by George Turner. A touching short novel, *Afro Dite and the Rainbow Serpent*, by the late Val Cherry, full of the melancholy of country-town Australia. Amy's Children, Olga Masters's last completed novel, all human-hearted drama played out on a flat board by characters whose very names defy you to be interested in them - "Amy's parents, Gus and May Scrivener, and her brothers Norman and Fred" - and written in the prose style of a town map - "Diggers Creek, on the outskirts of . . ." etc. *White Lies*, a powerful short novel about New Guinea by Trevor Shearston, excessively descriptive but passionate and outraged and informed, in the strong Koch/Blanche d'Alpuget Australian colonial tradition. *Palu*, by Louis Nowra, a weak, not-short-enough novel about New Guinea in the magic, myth and bathos tradition - "I'll tell you straight, I am scared shitless of dying."

But there are only three novels that I have found which really do strike out (to borrow the medium from Tim Winton) with any confidence or ambition. Thomas Keneally's *The Playmaker*; Murray Ball's *Holden's Performance*; and Robert Drewe's *Fortune*.

No one could ever charge Thomas Keneally with novelistic faint-heartedness. With a consistency it is easy to take for granted he has, for some years now, been writing quickly, fearlessly and well about the big issues of our time. "Just think of a topic", I once overheard someone saying in a literary Sydney night-spot, "and Tom'll tackle it." I never did find out if Tom was Thomas Keneally. But that he should have been ready with the ideal bicentenary novel will come as no surprise to anybody. If the schedule had not been so exacting, even for him, one might have hazarded that he'd made a fiction out of the opening chapters of *The Fatal Shore*, so promptly does *The Playmaker* appear to respond to the challenge implicit in that book that there, among the much maligned and endlessly resourceful first convicts, is material for a novelist of courage.

There's nothing wrong with opportunism. Dickens knocked out his Christmas Stories conscientiously and a good Laureate is expected to remember birthdays. Good for Keneally, and good for Australia, if they've come to some understanding on the question of a laureateship for prose. Opportunism becomes a critical problem only when imagination lags behind opportunity; and in truth *The Playmaker* takes an unconscionable time persuading its author that he cares about it. The early new world wonder is curiously lustreless, delivered in leaden sentences: "The otherness of New South Wales. Which was not new and certainly not Wales. Whatever it was, it had nothing at all to do with the old Druidic Kingdom. The gods were different here." He doesn't know what to do with all the eighteenth-century low-life jargon he has unearthed, except rather gleefully list it: "Side-way had gone on offering both Faddy and Ralph such London criminal insults, such cant-talk abuse, that the two of them were united in temporary friendship. He'd called them cooler-klases (sodomites), and catchfarts (lycophants), and scabbados (syphilites) . . ." And he is at a loss, embarrassingly boyish, whenever he has to engage with the subject of whole-hearted convict sexuality.

For while things were absolutely visible, and it was clear from her barely suppressed hoots of enthusiasm that one of Harry's tenets about her - that she did not

know how to enjoy a man - was here disproved. Hoots of enthusiasm?

But Keneally knows something utterly basic about the form of the novel and the liberties even of inattention you can take with it: employ diverse characters in an exotic setting, and engage their affections, each for each, and the cumulative process of narrative will work its own magic in the end. And so it does in this case. By the time the novel finally slides out of fiction into the epilogue, where we learn of the actors' actual fates, our sympathies have been exquisitely enlisted. Invention, at the last, has become a worthy interpreter of truth. Especially, it should be said, in the case of the almost unbearably poignant confrontations between the white newcomer and the black *ab origine*. On that subject Keneally seems to me incomparable. No one is better on the clash of ideologies, on the intransigence of belief systems, the havoc wreaked by proselytizing moralities. If someone - some white writer, at least - is to tackle the state of play between Europeans and Aborigines in Australia today, it ought to be Keneally. Keneally at full stretch though, taking all the time he needs.

As Murray Ball determinedly takes his. It is eight years now since his last novel, *Homesickness*, appeared; which is about the length of time a painstaking reader is likely to feel he ought to give to unravelling *Holden's Performance*, so tightly woven and allusive is it. The difficulty - and let me say I'm all for difficulty - could be called stylistic, except that style and subject, prose and preoccupation, are here bound, truly knotted, inextricably. This, for example, is an early description of the outer, and therefore of course the inner, condition of the hero:

Holden shuffled forward several paces. A lurching clumsiness spread from his limbs, blurring his vision and all distinctions, a moral condition - a know-nothingness - which he would increasingly find himself struggling against.

Everything is gruesomely at one here; the arthritic sentence structure, the locked clauses, the abrupt but surprising parenthesis, the syntactical ungainliness mirroring the physical and moral state of Holden. Which creates which? The style the character, or the character the style? Either way, it's not difficult to understand why an author who writes like this takes an interest in a character who moves like that. And so another uncomfortable Australian hero, another moral misfit, out of kilter with his time and place, is born.

But the shadow of Patrick White does not fall on Holden. He's as much a car as he's a person, don't forget. So the consolations of transcendence are not open to him. Large and cumbersome and ugly, he chugs through post-war Australia establishing tenuous relations with other oddballs like himself. It's a life. And it is one of the queer charms of this novel that if Murray Ball, too, is not sympathetic to his age, he is so warmly disposed to all those who are not sympathetic to it either that a grand canvas of discomfort starts to emerge. As if Australia itself were above all and at its best a land fit for misfits:

The streets of Adelaide had become the domain of the fabulous, the freakish and the disabled: not only dwarfs and obese waddling men or shadowless canillivered figures, the seven-footers, pinheads and flat-earthers, or even those lonely men with eleven fingers or hare-lips (somehow no good aiming a rifle), but more to the point, pale men who couldn't run, think or see straight, poor devils . . . figures normally outside the body politic but now the core; gentle, vague, harmless creatures.

Carmel Bird: *The Woodpecker Toy Fact and other stories*. 143pp. Fitzroy: McPhee Gribble/Ringwood: Penguin. Paperback, Aus \$7.95. 0 14 010472 0. Angelo Loukakakis: *Vernacular Dreams*. 179pp. University of Queensland Press. Paperback, \$25.95. 0 7022 0225 6. Gerald Murnane: *Landscape with Landscape*. 267pp. Ringwood: Penguin. Paperback, \$11.95. 0 14 00751 1. Tim Winton: *Scission and other stories*. 155pp. Weldonfeld and Nicolson. \$9.95. 0 297 79166 4. Angela Masters: *Amy's Children*. 240pp. University of Queensland Press. \$12.95. 0 7022 2010 8. Trevor Shearston: *White Lies*. 206pp. University of Queensland Press. Paperback, \$5.95. 0 7022 2026 4. Louis Nowra: *Palu*. 222pp. Wollahara: Picador. Paperback, Aus \$10.95. 0 330 27082 6. Thomas Keneally: *The Playmaker*. 310pp. Hodder and Stoughton. \$10.95. 0 340 34154 8. Murray Ball: *Holden's Performance*. 353pp. Faber. \$10.95. 0 571 14826 3. Robert Drewe: *Fortune*. 253pp. Picador. Paperback, \$3.95. 0 330 27072 9.

And so the varied, the abundant, the wide spectacle of Australian life takes on a surreal configuration. The war has made a sort of moral choice for the country and delivered it back to its forgotten children. By Arnold's definition this might still be morbidity, but even morbidity enjoys its intervals of exultation.

Robert Drewe's *Fortune* has no truck with morbidity. Or parochialism. This is metropolitan stuff, seeking to show that Australian writers can mix it with the best Americans. There's an excellent Vonnegut pastiche, sorrowful and exhilarating in its own right, charting the random ricochet journey of a bullet first tracked in a Lone Avenger comic-book find-the-bullet contest. And much that reminds one of Styron, or is it Below, or is it Hemingway, as well as a general taste for the swag of Yankee slang and know-how, such as we get in this description of a group of Americans (there's the justification) sheltering in a remote West Australian coastal town:

They were first-stage nuclear refugees, most of them, Cold War pacifists and McCarthy victims hunkered down in the sand dunes nursing their buffalo grass and waiting for their New Yorkers and Atlantics to arrive three months late.

In their more feisty moments . . . I'm not sure that even Americans should be encouraged to hunker down and feel feisty in Australia.

But it is Scott Fitzgerald that one is most reminded of, not so much stylistically as emotionally. And structurally too, as witness the strategic contrast between the restrained narrator - a newspaper man - and the adventurer whose story he tells, himself a sort of Australian Gatsby, gorgeous and doomed:

In 1983 I was too far away from Perth's efficient rumour mills, and too selectively cynical, to take into account such journalistic intangibles as romantic despair. I could identify easily enough with the sublimation of ego, with simple chagrin, with someone having had bulky obstacles thrown in the path of ambition. But I hadn't enough understanding of heroic madness, of erratic martyrdom, of the willingness to go over the edge.

No, but then which of us has?

It's a dangerous game, seeking to hold the sharp tang of such glamorous extremism in a selectively cynical net. Write it a little too roundly and you have melodrama; make it a little too flat and you have bathos. Robert Drewe seems to me just a little too flat. And yet the ambitions of *Fortune* - to sound an Australia that isn't the familiarly fictionalized one of benumbed inner-city bohemia or slumbering bush, to mythologize a figure whose stature and glamour and ultimate destruction are on a more international scale than those of the country's usual heroes of folklore, in short to deparochialize the Australian novel - such ambitions are laudable enough, whether or not. In this instance, we can accept the will for the deed.

There is still a taste for poetic primitivism in Australian writing, for recounting the minor heroic struggles, the "dalliance", as I've seen it put, of Norman and Fred. Before one can be "adequate" one must be "modern". Treating the country as a vast repository of stale human-drama yarns is as profitless, in the end, as averting one's eyes altogether from the stirring spectacle. Boldness will win the day, as it has, in the Australian novel, already. In the mean time, it would be good to see an embargo on Australian whimsy and minimalism, and a moratorium, with just the odd special exemption, on the Australian short story.

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Convictions upheld

Sunil Khilnani

TARIQ ALI
Street Fighting Years: An autobiography of the sixties
280pp. Collins, £12.95.
00021777X

Except in times of revolution, revolutionaries are apt to look a little absurd. In the late 1960s, when it seemed that even the societies of the West were on the verge of radical political change, figures like Tariq Ali held a certain menace for what was then known generically as The Establishment. Young, articulate, possessing charm and the mystique of an authentic Third World revolutionary, leader of a militant student movement, Tariq Ali seemed destined to succeed. Today, exiled from Zia's Pakistan, excluded from the mainstream of British politics not only by Mrs Thatcher but by the Labour Party leadership, he has little room to exercise his talents. He remains, though, typical and representative of a certain kind of 1960s radicalism, which often veered into outlandish positions but which also epitomized the decade at its best.

To be radical in Britain during that period was certainly (and for some perhaps merely) to be chic, but Tariq Ali has had the courage to retain his convictions even into an age when

they look decidedly *démodé*. This political memoir of the 1960s shows, in poignant manner, that he has kept these beliefs not because of faith in some apocalyptic moment yet to arrive, but because of his strong sense of the inequities of existing political arrangements. Not that this derived from personal experience. Born to an eminent Lahore family (his father edited the major national daily newspaper in Pakistan), his childhood and youth were comfortable. He was twenty when he arrived in Britain in 1963. He went up to Oxford that autumn, and in 1965 became President of the Oxford Union. Immediately after graduating he took a job with *Town* magazine, then edited by Julian Critchley and backed by Michael Heseltine. Like so many student radicals, he was a beneficiary rather than a victim of the System.

But where earlier (and subsequent) post-war student generations were content to shun politics, the 1960s generation was different. Towards the end of the decade, students emerged as a distinct and autonomous social group, with their own political interests and forms of protest. The reasons for this were to some extent attributable to the sudden expansion in higher education. More significantly, coming to maturity at the climax of an economic boom and in the post-Cold War climate of "peaceful coexistence", the political sensibility of this generation was deeply affected by the changing

dimension of international politics. The issue which mobilized students was the manifestly unequal struggle between imperialism and the national liberation movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Tariq Ali himself travelled to Vietnam and was outraged by what he saw (he kept a diary during the journey, and the excerpts included in the present book powerfully record this anger). Returning to Britain, he helped to set up the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, and his untiring oratory was instrumental in keeping this issue at the forefront of the student movement.

But one penalty of maintaining such an internationalist perspective was the lack of any serious analysis of local politics, and a consequent inability to identify or capture a settled constituency. The student movement succeeded in broadening the scope of the traditional Labour movement, but it remained unconnected to, and not very interested in, the mainstream of British working-class politics. Those who experienced the euphoric events of the 1960s watched with bewilderment as the various amorphous elements which earlier had been joined together by the Vietnam campaign dispersed and settled in unexpected places. Paradoxically, the student movement ended in the early 1970s, just when sectors of the British working class appeared to enter a new phase of militancy (the "work-in" of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, the miners' strike of 1972).

The transformed economic and political climate of the 1970s and 1980s pushed many who

remained on the radical Left into fiercely sectarian and dogmatic positions. To his credit, Tariq Ali avoided this. Influenced by his reading of Trotsky, Isaac Deutscher and Ernest Mandel, he had joined the International Marxist Group, affiliated to Pierre Frank's Fourth International. But his Trotskyism was more open and eclectic than earlier versions, and willingly incorporated elements of the "counter-culture".

This openness to, and presence of, other voices and opinions is one of the more engaging qualities of this chronicle. *Street Fighting Years* is not an analytically acute or theoretically imposing attempt to assess the significance of the events described in it. Nor does it contain the detail and complexity of good autobiography. It includes personal anecdotes, and documents some of the certainties and doubts of Tariq Ali's political formation (the book is stronger on certainties than on doubts), but there is too often a sense of calculated intimacy. This is unfortunate, for the best moments in the book are the most personal — he can write movingly, as he does about the death of his close friend Clive Goodwin. The book's staccato prose does succeed in conveying a sense of the excitement of the period. Tariq Ali observes that "mocking the sixties became a European pastime in the late seventies and eighties" and the underlying impulse of his own book is a desire to renew our connection with those passionate and imaginative years.

Outrage unforced

Hanif Kureishi

ROBERT CHESHYRE
The Return of a Native Reporter
320pp. Viking, £10.95.
0670817341

Mrs Thatcher is now into her third term in office and it must be the serious job of British writers to evaluate the gains and losses of her long innings. In *The Return of a Native Reporter*, Robert Cheshyre, who returned to Britain in the winter of 1985 after a four-year stint as the *Observer's* correspondent in the United States, has made an impressive attempt to look at the country which he left in 1981 as if it were a foreign land. This ambitious book is particularly affecting and convincing because, although Cheshyre is an unabashed admirer of America — its pluralism, enterprise, and education system — one never feels, as he moves about Britain from North to South, poor to rich, black to white, that he has a preconception about what he is going to find.

So when he goes north to Durham and sees dozens of men scavenging on a freezing beach for coal to hawk round the council estate at £2 a bag, his outrage is graphic and unforced:

If several hundred residents of Brighton were forced to spend twelve hours a day bent double in the surf, garnering what amounts to waste, in order to make enough money to keep their families in decent rather than indecent poverty, the scandal would not be tolerated by either parliament or press.

In Skelmersdale, a "new town" built in 1966 outside Liverpool, he makes us feel the reality of unemployment: single women with children living without gas or electricity; heroin and valium addiction rife. These are the people whom Norman Tebbit told to get on their bikes, ignoring the fact that house prices in the South are three times what they are in the North — if a northern house is saleable in the first place.

Not that life in the South is always affluent and easy. Milkmen and police dare not enter the housing estates of North Peckham; old people barricade themselves in their lower flats for fear of attack by uneducated, unemployed youths, themselves brutalized by an environment where to survive you have to lose your humanity. Yet only a mile or two away from these estates, overlooking Tower Bridge, apartments converted from old warehouses are selling for £380,000. Cheshyre writes: "I found I had returned to a society that was flaunting wealth in a way the rich had considered unseemly in the post-war years."

This wealth, which could have revolutionized areas of manufacturing industry, has

not — any more than the oil money — been invested either in people or in the making of solid things. And this is the real tragedy of Britain today. It is not only that the contrast between advantaged and disadvantaged is so extreme, or that it is particularly intolerable to be poor or unemployed, but that Thatcherism has so far failed where it should have triumphed: in the stimulation of business and science, and, crucially, in the improvement of education so that vital young people are given a springboard for success. Cheshyre tells us that in the United States if you have an idea, next morning three people will lend you money to get started. In Britain, despite all the talk of the "enterprise culture", banks are reluctant to back new ideas and the Government refuses to provide alternative sources of capital for small businesses.

As for the scientists — poorly paid and blithely told to go to industry for research funding — they, like other academics, are crowding the airports in the flight from Britain. In the spring of 1987, ten professorial chairs in computer science at British universities, including Oxford, were vacant; suitable candidates were not forthcoming.

Cheshyre is no Orwell, and lacks the prose and the ideology really to come to terms with the poor. But he is, mercifully, without grand hypotheses or theorizing: he has simply talked to a great range and number of people and humbly recorded their responses. His book presents a terminal picture of Britain and is a profound indictment of its failure and decline. He tells us little that is new or surprising but has brought together such a well argued and researched catalogue of snobbery and class ennoblement, racism and violence, filth and inefficiency, that the effect is deeply shocking. For him: "coming back across the Atlantic was like leaving an invigorating breeze to plunge into a stuffy, smoke-filled back-room". Every Cabinet minister should be forced to read this book.

A Decade of Anarchy 1961-1970: Selections from the monthly journal Anarchy, edited by Colin Ward (287pp. Freedom Press. Paperback, £5. 0 900384 37 9). Is one of six such compilations issued by the Press to commemorate a century of periodical publishing. Among the pieces reprinted here are "Conversations about Anarchism", the text of Richard Boston's 1968 Radio 3 programme in which he interviewed a number of prominent anarchists, "Poor People" by Alan Sillitoe, "Black Anarchy in New York" by H. W. Morion, "Towards a Libertarian Critique" by Tony Gibson, and "Direct Action and the Urban Environment" by Robert Swann.

Reading a revolution

Tony Thorndike

GORDON K. LEWIS
Grenada: The jewel despoiled
239pp. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, £17.75.
0801834228
BRIAN CROZIER (Editor)
The Grenada Documents
182pp. Sherwood, 35 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7JB, £9.95.
0907671276

When the United States invaded the small island of Grenada in 1983 international law was disregarded. Grenada's sovereignty was violated, even though no US citizens were in danger (despite repeated assertions to the contrary), and there was no American negotiation with the revolutionary military government, which had usurped power on the island prior to what the State Department called the "pre-dawn vertical insertion". But the overwhelming majority of the 90,000 inhabitants seemed to see the American marines as angels descending from the sky to rescue them. Faced with this reality, the Caribbean Left and other supporters of the Grenadian revolution could barely hide their embarrassment.

Although in historical terms the Grenadian revolution (1979-83) was brief, it inspired a great deal of myth on all sides. Gordon K. Lewis presents a sober assessment of the revolution's achievements without disguising his position, which is that of a democratic socialist who does not pretend that "objectivity about

method is confused with neutrality of purpose". *Grenada: The jewel despoiled* is broad in scope and reflects Professor Lewis's personal anguish at the internal collapse of the ruling New Jewel Movement, the killing of Prime Minister Maurice Bishop and some sixty others and the subsequent era of "craze McCarthyism" — the persecution and victimization of those who associated themselves with the revolution's aims and achievements. In a region where political thought has traditionally been dependent on imported values and ideas, the New Jewel Movement stood out as a force for national identity and pride. Its demise rendered the reassertion of traditional deference to the United States all the more poignant.

Lewis has had time to reflect on Grenada's revolutionary experience and has been able to draw heavily on the many government and other documents taken from Grenada by the CIA. He exploits these in order to prove convincingly that Bernard Coard, Bishop's deputy, together with the young ultra-left zealots with whom he surrounded himself, bear ultimate responsibility for the violent deaths and the end of the People's Revolutionary Government. Although Lewis makes clear that "person and ideology do not exist separately from each other", a close understanding of those involved is critical. Lewis believes that Coard the technocrat began to conspire against Bishop in order to take the New Jewel further to the left as early as 1982. Although, like the more popular Bishop, he was aware of the danger of losing support for the revolution and that socialist policies, particularly those derived from the preferred Cuban model, would have to be introduced with care, after Bishop

refused to share this leadership, Coard had him placed under house arrest.

Not surprisingly, on October 19, 1983, part of the largest crowd ever assembled in Grenada rescued their hero and, together with those of his supporters in the Cabinet not imprisoned elsewhere, Bishop was taken triumphantly to the old slave fortress overlooking the Portofino-like harbour of the capital, St George's. But the army, on Coard's orders, attacked the crowd, and eventually Bishop and his close colleagues were executed by firing squad.

Lewis's emphasis on conspiracy — first by Coard, and then by the United States — inevitably leads to some distortion. The Marxist-Leninist study group around Coard, the Organization for Research, Education and Liberation (OREL) — incorrectly named the Organization for Educational Advance and Research — appears in his book to have been all-forecasting, but this essentially sixth-form debating society had, by 1980, to all intents and purposes, ceased to exist; it was only useful to Coard's opponents after his capture. Lewis hints that the crisis was CIA-inspired; he believes that the Grenadian traitor was Ian St Bernard — the only one of the original twenty Coard sympathizers accused of Bishop's murder who was freed after a Preliminary Inquiry in 1984. But, in fact, there is no evidence whatsoever to support such a charge. Lewis also suggests that serious military intelligence mistakes, suffered by the United States forces, were in fact deliberate propaganda and that documents captured in Grenada by the CIA were altered or even forged.

Lewis's view is that US policy in Grenada was dictated by a belief in "Manifest Destiny". This has resulted in a "popular social imperialism in American life" in which power breeds arrogance and where moral bankruptcy has "replaced the work ethic with the play ethic, honesty with subversion". Although the democratic spirit in America remains potent, "liberals are the victims of the intellectual backwardness of American life" and they hardly ques-

tioned Reagan's use of force in Grenada. Lewis also seems less than fair when, on the whole, he avoids commenting on the "revolutionary manners" imposed on Grenadians by the New Jewel régime: "manners" such as the banning of opposition parties, the introduction of censorship and preventive detention.

The Movement did achieve many positive social and economic changes, particularly in adult education, agriculture, health and rural water supply, and many of these were lost following the entry of the Americans and the reassertion of the Grenadian élite's dependency upon imported, and especially American, values. It had, however, a tiny, élitist and unrepresentative membership; it was secretive and sectarian, and the Stalinist Central Committee demanded "iron discipline", "absolute obedience" and the uncritical acceptance of an alien political system imported from the Soviet Union.

There is no such sophisticated critique in *The Grenada Documents*, edited by Brian Crozier. The author's highly selective use of the captured documents is reinforced by the tone of Sir Alfred Sherman's introduction. Together, they present a picture of Grenada as a communist dictatorship closely controlled by the Soviet Union, in which the International Department of the Soviet Communist Party assigned specific tasks to the New Jewel Movement. *The Grenada Documents* is perhaps the most dogmatically anti-left book on Grenada that has appeared since the demise of the revolution, and it seems pointless to attempt to counteract its distortions by citing evidence of the Grenadian zealots' frustration when the Soviet Union was reluctant to accept them as "trustworthy" communists and so underwrite the tottering economy. Many documents exist, among those captured in Grenada, which illustrate the sharp commercial practice, verging on exploitation, displayed by the Soviet Union and East Germany. It is clear that it is not only America that does not want a "second Cuba" on its doorstep; neither does the Soviet Union.

Waiting for democracy

David Nicholls

JAMES FERGUSON
Papa Doc, Baby Doc: Haiti and the Duvaliers
171pp. Oxford: Blackwell, £14.95.
0631156011

A short while ago the reputed "strongman" of the present governing *junta* in Haiti, Colonel Williams Régala, visited Washington, and was told emphatically that free elections must go ahead in November. Any attempts by the military to intervene in the democratic process would result in an end to all forms of American aid. Fearing that the colonel would pay little attention to the words of civilians, a few brass hats from the Pentagon were called in to reinforce the point.

The "democratic process" for Haiti — as for many other countries in the Caribbean — has meant in the past the election rather than the imposition by direct military action of the next dictator. Haitians who are old enough will look back to 1957, when François Duvalier was elected president after a similarly extended campaign. Will there be a new Duvalier? Will one of the innocent-looking, modest, apparently benevolent candidates assume the sinister mantle of Baron Samedi? Although there were irregularities in the 1957 election, there can be little doubt that — of the candidates who finally presented themselves — Duvalier was preferred by the majority. It is a conclusion many Haitians find hard to acknowledge. He was also viewed as acceptable by the United States as well as by its aid mission. Will a dictator emerge again from these elections?

James Ferguson's *Papa Doc, Baby Doc*, while following a pattern established by a number of recent interpreters of Haiti's past, is a lively and accurate account of the rise and fall of the Duvaliers. Though directed to a wide readership, it avoids the sensationalism which for many years characterized popular writings on this much-maligned country. After a brief historical survey, Ferguson considers in more detail the principal features of Duvalierism. He correctly establishes the popular backing for Papa Doc among the black middle classes in the capital and the provincial towns, though he does not, I think, sufficiently emphasize how Baby Doc's loss of this support set the stage for his eventual collapse. He chronicles the principal events of the Duvalier régime and shows how groups which Papa Doc had effectively eliminated from the political scene — Church,

business community, intellectuals, trade unions, army — gradually returned during Jean Claude's years in office.

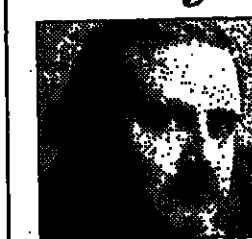
Twice Ferguson writes of François Duvalier "panicking": at the invasion of 1958 (when a group of exiles seized the barracks) and in the crisis with the Dominican Republic of 1963 (when President Juan Bosch was preparing to invade from the east). But whether Duvalier's behaviour during these events can be interpreted as panic is doubtful. His reaction to both situations can be plausibly explained as calculated moves to disorient his opponents.

Perhaps the most important feature of the protests which led to the departure of Baby Doc in February 1986 was that they were instigated in the countryside and the provincial towns. The US occupation of Haiti (1915-34), during which the peasants were disarmed for the first time since 1791, had put an end to a nineteenth-century tradition of rural guerrilla activity. Subsequently power was centralized in the capital, where, until the 1980s, significant movements have been based. It is too much to hope for the election of a president who really acts in the interests of the masses, for in Haiti rhetoric about the peasants as the true foundation of the country is the stuff of campaign speeches and soon forgotten by the victor. It may, however, be the case that rural groups have become well enough established over recent months to resist the impositions of the government and to defend the interests of the masses against a predatory State. When Haitians say "Aprè bondié c'est léta" (after God comes the State) they refer not to the benevolence, but to the power and unpredictability of God: acts of the State in Haiti tend, like "acts of God", to be arbitrary and generally destructive.

Discussing the policies of the ruling *junta*, Ferguson rightly concludes that — apart from a degree of civil liberty and cosmetic gestures against some former *toniton macoute* — no major changes have been made since the Duvalier régime ended, and that the revolution remains "unfinished". He also emphasizes the important role played by the Church in the present crisis as well as the continued significance of Vodoodoo. Though stronger as an account of events than as analysis of underlying causes and tendencies, *Papa Doc, Baby Doc* — well written and intelligently presented — provides a useful background to the current situation in Haiti and to the "democratic process" which Colonel Régala and his military colleagues view with such unease.

THE TIMES

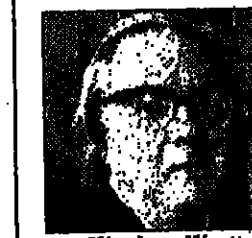
Books for Christmas



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THE TIMES

A lion among paper tigers (25p)

Caring how in caring for

David Collard

AMARTYA SEN
On Ethics and Economics
131pp. Oxford: Blackwell. £14.95.
0301151919

Over the years Amartya Sen has raised, and often answered, a series of fundamental questions about welfare economics. Now, in this slim book of his Royce Lectures, he attempts a sort of intellectual brokerage between welfare economics and ethics.

Since Adam Smith, mainstream economists have scraped away at the ethical component of their subject until there seems to be very little of it left. Indeed they have found it convenient to ignore Smith's other great work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Prudence, in that book, means reason and understanding plus self-command (not self-love). The subsequent narrowing-down of Smith was, argues Sen, a major cause of the impoverishment of economic theory. I agree with Sen about this, but quoting passages from *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is not sufficient to resolve the Smith Problem. There remains a sneaking suspicion that Smith felt he had satisfactorily proved what came to be the mainstream position: that because of the Invisible Hand it was sufficient in market transactions to assume rational, self-interested behaviour. If this were so, it would be quite right to ignore ethics while doing economics. And, in fact, the results of ploughing on for a century or two in this manner have sometimes been impressive – a point which Sen well recognizes. One result was the elegant Fundamental Theorem of Welfare Economics, which has the remarkable double property that every competitive equilibrium is an optimum and any optimum can be achieved via a competitive equilibrium. In other words competition is a Good Thing. Notice that the ethical input to the theorem stops well short of old-fashioned Utilitarianism.

Terms like "Optimum" and "Good Thing" suggest that significant ethical assumptions are hidden away here somewhere. One of these is that judgments about income distribution are "subjective" and should be kept separate. Sen's own contributions to this area of theory have been substantial. He recognizes the subjective nature of statements about distribution, of course (this was one of the points of his *On Economic Inequality* of 1973). But his later writings have emphasized that the convenient split between distributional statements (subjective) and efficiency statements (objective) cannot really be sustained. This is rather a pity: it would have been nice to have had the ethical component in economics neatly segregated inside a separate compound, where Rawls and Nozick could have grazed peacefully, doing little harm to anyone else.

The other ethical assumption behind the Fundamental Theorem concerns the nature of the optimum itself. It is a very special optimum, requiring very limited ethical assumptions. The optimum is simply a state in which no further mutually beneficial "trades" may be made. If such "trades" are available they will be made under competition; if not, "improvement" is possible only if one party gains at the expense of others. To decide about that we have to go to Ethics. But for the rest all we need is for people to be rational and self-interested. They choose what they want and we allow their preferences to count. Sen has previously referred to this approach as Welfarism, and regards its ethical base as a miserably limited one. A major theme of these lectures is the need to establish a much richer base.

Consider rationality. The doctrine of "revealed preference" says that people choose what they prefer, given what is available. It would be irrational for them to do otherwise. On this doctrine it would hardly be possible to be other than rational, and rationality is thus a kind of consistency. Sen is not keen on this tautological interpretation: "rational choice must demand something at least about the correspondence between what one tries to achieve and how one goes about it". But this discussion of rationality which, in the end, turns so much on definitions, is less interesting than his discussion of self-interest.

There are at least two things wrong with the dominance of the assumption of self-interest in economics. First, it leaves out whole ranges of human behaviour for which it provides only a weak explanation: giving to charity, voting against one's direct interests, devoting oneself to a good cause, helping those struck by disaster, etc. Admittedly it is possible, just, to force most of these forms of altruism into the Procrustean bed of self-interest, but the exercise is unduly cramping. Here I emphasize the "altruistic" nature of departures from self-interest, though Sen includes examples of customary and conventional behaviour as well.

This leads immediately to the second major disadvantage of self-love, that it might not be conducive to the efficient attainment of one's goals. Departures from self-love may instead be instrumental in achieving what we want. Take the case of environmental pollution. It is easy to see that too much pollution will result if competing firms are left to their own devices; the Fundamental Theorem then breaks down and a referee (the State?) has to step in. But many situations in between may be modelled as games in which co-operation is actually superior to competition. Departures from self-interest may then prove efficient.

So we see that economics could profit (as it were) by releasing Ethics from its compound. The result would be a plural economic framework in which people's preferences and the justifications for choice were partial, a distressing prospect for those who like their in-

dications to be simple. But if simple indicators have to be qualified in various ways, then the value of simplicity is not so clear. For example, comparisons of various countries' well-being based upon the simple indicator of GDP per capita would need to be buttressed by other indicators – of life expectancy, literacy, etc. The outcome of such pluralism would be an untidier but still rigorous welfare economics.

The other object of Sen's missionary work is to persuade philosophers that economics can be of use to them. This will generally be the case, he argues, for consequentialist statements, though not for absolute statements, for example about liberty or about honesty. Economics will be able to help (in the consequentialist case) because of what Sen calls its "engineering" role. As an example he cites general equilibrium theory and the analysis of famine, to which he himself has made great contributions. Or, to take a related example, we might start from the Greatest Happiness principle, where it is good to feed the hungry. At this point the economist may be called in, not to prevent the hungry being fed, but to analyse the consequences of such feeding for indigenous agricultural incomes, national growth, etc. In his engineering role the economist is quite used to handling interdependent systems, sometimes with long chains of causation. Sen is clearly right here, though his point is to some degree the well-known one that to be ethical in our economic behaviour one needs to know some economics. But the point is not

unique to economics, for just as ethical economic behaviour requires knowledge of economics, ethical medical behaviour requires a knowledge of medicine, and so on. Consequentialist statements about action in the world require a knowledge of the world.

Economics by itself, however, is very often unable to deliver clear consequentialist answers. Suppose I am in favour of economic sanctions against South Africa. I am not sure that my view is an entirely consequentialist one, but, to the extent that it is, economics is of only limited help. I need to know the consequences of my action for trade patterns, incomes per head and their distribution, the dynamics of the political and class structure in South Africa, etc. The answers to these questions are uncertain but clearly they require more than a knowledge of economics. In a sense this brings us full circle to Smith. Not only was the ethical basis of his analysis a rich one but he treated economics as part of a unified social science, together with moral philosophy. It is ironic that if modern economics is to be of any help in answering Big Questions, then the discarded bits have somehow to be reintegrated with it.

Slim though it is, this volume finishes with thirty-two pages of references, justified if they lead philosophers to seek out the economic references and vice versa. A measure of its success will be the intellectual work it stimulates across the now fuzzy boundary between the two disciplines.

Advising and developing

Christopher Johnson

DONALD MACDOUGALL
Don and Mandarin: Memoirs of an economist
276pp. Murray. £14.95.
0719544216

Economists have a poor reputation these days, for making wrong forecasts and advocating impracticable policies. Keynesian economists in government during the twenty years after the war, such as Sir Donald MacDougall and Sir Alec Cairncross, have been the butt of monetarist politicians, who now listen to another generation of knights, Sir Alan Walters and Sir Terence Burns. Yet the record of the Keynesians stands up well by comparison with that of their successors, and in *Don and Mandarin* MacDougall describes his half-century of plum jobs in and out of (but mostly in) government with pride and without apologies.

He emerges from these chatty memoirs as a precocious, painstaking, persistent Balliol Scot with the ability to spot problems, handle people, and get things done. His intermittent academic career gave him a solid basis for assignments as a national, and sometimes international, civil servant. His *magnum opus* was *The World Dollar Problem* (1957); ironically, the problem turned out to be too many dollars rather than too few, as he ruefully acknowledges. The other work for which he will be remembered, the 1977 "MacDougall Report" on European fiscal federalism, commissioned by the EEC, ended only in being ahead of rather than behind the times.

Now that MacDougall is able to take us behind the scenes we can see that his claim to fame is in the realm of deeds even more than in that of words. He had a good ear as head of statistics for "Prof." Lindemann, Churchill's right-hand man, and went on important missions to the United States and, in 1945, to Germany. He was to rejoin the "Prof." in government in the early 1950s, and details how he and others then managed to abort the misnamed ROBOT plan to free the pound. In between times, his lily feet took him away from Oxford for a year in 1948-49 to become the first Economics Director of the Organization for European Economic Co-operation in Paris.

MacDougall's finest years were in Whitehall from 1962 to 1973, when, for all the sterling crises, Great Britain's economic growth rate was faster than either before or since. To those days it did not matter whether you served in Labour or Conservative cabinets, since the two parties' economic policies had converged in a

mon. MacDougall was the first Economic Director of the new National Economic Development Council ("Neddy") created in 1962 by the Tories to plan for faster growth, and happily carried on by Labour. The enthusiasm with which they then tried to raise the growth rate from 3 to 4 per cent a year brings to mind Nigel Lawson, the current Chancellor of the Exchequer, forecasting the selfsame growth rate for 1987. After a quarter of a century, the wheel has come full circle.

MacDougall was a key figure in the ill-fated Labour experiment of the new Department of Economic Affairs, set up in 1964. He describes vividly both the miseries and the splendours of working for George Brown, whom he converted to his own belief in devaluation – a policy as well suited in his view to the circumstances of 1964 as it had been ill suited to those of 1952. It is revealing to find how often ministers and officials kept returning to the idea, which Harold Wilson and Jim Callaghan first tried to suppress, then tardily implemented.

The summit of MacDougall's career was his period as Chief Economic Adviser to the Treasury from 1969-73, first to Roy Jenkins, then to Tony Barber and thus, in effect, to Ted Heath. He retired in October 1973, not a bad time to close a chapter of Keynesian economics; like so many economic advisers, he has the defence that his advice was not taken. There was too much reflation by too many channels during his last five years in power.

Thereafter, until 1984, MacDougall had a new lease of life as Chief Economic Adviser to the Confederation of British Industry. Leading industrialists are not, unfortunately, very interesting to read about except possibly for those who know them. Yet the last three chapters of the book are valuable for the picture they give of the top men in the CBI and the TUC working together in the 1970s to achieve a Labour government's objective of pay restraint. After 1979, the mould of this cosy corporatism was broken; the CBI now finds it difficult to get on close terms with either the TUC or its own Conservative government. How much better off are we without such a tripartite understanding? The CBI, having lost its share of the empire, has not yet found a new role.

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Eloquent but elusive

Stephen P. Stich

GERALD E. MYERS
William James: His life and thought
628pp. Yale University Press. £30.
0300034172
GRAHAM BIRD
William James: The arguments of the philosophers
221pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul. £15.95.
071009602X

There are few figures in the history of American thought as important as William James, or as intriguing. Since his death in 1910, there has been a steady stream of scholarship analysing his work, his character and the complex interrelations between them. Gerald E. Myers's monumental examination of James's life and thought is a major contribution to this literature, and destined to become the definitive treatment for decades.

The man portrayed in this exhaustive, and occasionally exhausting, study is a complex, subtle, often elusive thinker who saw philosophical issues in novel and unexpected ways. He had an extraordinary gift for expressing his vision in engaging prose punctuated by vivid examples and anecdotes. One striking measure of the appeal of his ideas is the size of the audiences he attracted. In 1906 and 1907, his public lectures on pragmatism in New York and Boston often drew a thousand or more listeners. But James's eloquence was at best a mixed blessing. For, as Myers makes plain, he was often prepared to sacrifice clarity and careful exposition for an arresting image or a memorable turn of phrase. Though he often protested that his critics misunderstood him, his penchant for pithy slogans must bear much of the blame. In the long run, it has been the slogans, the images and the short snatches of argument that have survived and influenced other thinkers. James's "Radical Empiricism", the systematic metaphysical theory on which he laboured during the last decade of his life, was neither novel enough nor clear enough to attract many adherents. He envisaged Radical Empiricism opening a new path in philosophy, providing a middle way between Materialism and Idealism. But, as Myers demonstrates in considerable detail, it is hard to see that James's metaphysical system is all that different from Berkeley's.

In James's work many have found the first distinctively American voice in philosophy – practical, bold, optimistic and iconoclastic. He was a scientist by training, and like most of what is best in American philosophy after James, his philosophical theorizing was always scientifically informed. But, as Myers emphasizes, he was also a man of intense, often dark emotions. During his lifelong battle with depression and despair, he quite self-consciously used philosophical theorizing as a weapon to keep his internal demons at bay. There are deep emotional needs behind much of James's writing, needs which he often made no attempt to conceal. Indeed, a central tenet in his thinking was that philosophies are essentially the expressions of their creator's temperament, and that the arguments used by philosophers are largely rationalizations of conclusions already sanctioned by their personalities. The vivid personality reflected in James's philosophical writings is part of what gives his work its enduring interest.

Another endlessly engaging feature of his character and work was his restless, egalitarian and sometimes quirky curiosity. Experience was the central element in James's philosophical system. In everyday experience he claimed to find objective space and time, along with the glue that held the self together. And in religious experience he thought he could find clues to the mysteries of the cosmos. The religious experience by which he set the most store was not the experience of the cerebral neo-Hegelians and transcendental idealists who dominated Western academia at the turn of the century. Rather, as Joseph Royce tells us, for James "the unconventional and the individual in religious experience are the means whereby the truth of a superhuman world may become more manifest". Thus, in preparing *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James "went plumbing" in order to get first-hand accounts of religious experience from mystics, oranks,

eccentrics, and inspired but lowly people". His Harvard colleague Santayana might look down his nose at the "communitistic, hysterical, spiritualistic or medicinal" sects that sprouted so prolifically in American soil, and "were despised by select and superior people". But for James, the members of these sects could offer valued accounts of experiences, to be studied and pondered with an open mind. This same curiosity about the unconventional led to a long involvement with psychics and psychic research, and to a spirited defence of faith-healers, Christian Scientists and "mind-curers" when a proposed medical licence bill in Massachusetts threatened to put them out of business.

If James was an engaging and unconventional thinker, he was also multi-faceted, and full of energy – hard to predict and even harder to pin down. One of the great virtues of Myers's long and meandering account is that it makes no effort to package James into tidy categories, or to paper over his many complexities and contradictions. There is no artificial systematization here, no argument that there is a deep psychological or philosophical unity underlying the sometimes bewildering diversity of James's thought. Myers's portrait is rich, complex and loose-jointed enough to make it seem less than mind-boggling that James could be claimed as an important influence by both Ludwig Wittgenstein and Benito Mussolini. Here I give just a few examples of the complexities and contrasts which Myers carefully records.

By most accounts, James was a great teacher who made a lasting impact on students as different as Theodore Roosevelt, Gertrude Stein, Walter Lippmann and W. E. B. Du Bois. Yet he did not enjoy teaching, and said, "I sometimes shudder at the thought of the bad instruction I have given".

During the middle years of his career, much of his time was devoted to research and writing in psychology. He founded the first experimental psychology laboratory in the world, and is still widely regarded as one of the great figures in the history of psychology. Yet he found experimental psychology tedious, had serious reservations about the value of what experiments revealed, and was greatly relieved when Münsterberg succeeded him as director of the psychology laboratory at Harvard. Moreover, during the almost two decades that James ran the laboratory he made not a single noteworthy discovery and, with the debatable exception of the James-Lange theory of emotions, he contributed nothing of significance to psychological theory.

In ethics, James defended a cautious respect for the principles of conventional morality, which he saw as the most recent result of the human race's long history of moral experimentation. Yet he also endorsed moral ideas that he himself described as revolutionary, like the rejection of retributive justice by Tolstoy and Bellamy. In politics, the man who said "the presumption in cases of conflict must always be in favor of the conventionally recognized good" was an unmistakable maverick. An anti-visitationist and anti-militarist, he opposed the Spanish-American War and was clearly out of step with the political spirit of his time.

In philosophy, James was an outspoken opponent of over-intellectualized abstractions that had no clear bearing on experience. He anticipated the logical positivists with his declaration that "there can be no difference that does not make a difference". If a pair of philosophical propositions seem to contradict each other, and yet "by supposing the truth of one you can foresee no conceivable practical consequence to anybody at any time or place, which is different from what you would foresee if you supposed the truth of the other", then, James insisted, the difference between the two doctrines is "only specious and verbal". It was in this no-nonsense spirit that James made his famous "Damn the Absolute" remark to Royce. Yet the same hard-nosed pragmatist who urged that we should determine the "cash value" of ideas flirted seriously with panpsychism, and with the mystical notion that there is a mother-sea of consciousness of which we are all part.

For all his eminence, influence and popular appeal, most of James's views found remarkably few advocates among the ranks of professional philosophers. The single exception was his pragmatism, which became the rallying cry

of a major philosophical movement with adherents in Britain, Italy and Germany as well as in many places in the United States. Characteristically, however, there was widespread confusion about just what Jamesian pragmatism did and did not maintain. Indeed, Myers claims with considerable plausibility that "in no philosophical movement have the defenders and critics been more confused about each other's meaning than in American pragmatism in the first decade of the twentieth century". James became increasingly frustrated as fellow Pragmatists, including Peirce, publicly distanced themselves from the movement, while an opponent like the neo-Hegelian Bradley began to wonder whether he himself had not "always... been a pragmatist". But, as Myers makes clear, James had no one to blame but himself, since under the label of "pragmatism" he had bundled a variety of ideas that had, at best, only a rough family resemblance to one another.

One of these ideas is, in effect, a sketch of a theory about the significance (or what more recent philosophers might call the "content") of a thought. According to James, a thought's significance is determined by its "practical consequences", that is, by the "sensations we are to expect from it" and the "reactions we must prepare". When put in this way, the doctrine sounds rather like the verificationist theory of meaning advocated by the logical positivists a half-century later. This account suggests that true thoughts are the ones that we could verify if we tried, and this notion is certainly present in James's writings: "True ideas are those we can assimilate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we can not."

But there is another doctrine, on the face of it very different from these, that James also portrayed as central to pragmatism. This second doctrine dealt with those situations, often of desperate emotional urgency for James, in which we must choose what to believe from among philosophical and religious propositions which cannot be verified or falsified by experiment or observation. In such situations, James urged a "subjective pragmatism" in which we explore the consequences of believing each alternative, and select the alternative whose consequences are best. Here, of course, the consequences in question are not observational, but emotional; they include the hope, the solace or the anguish that various beliefs may engender. Moreover, James seems to say that in choosing the belief with the best consequences we are believing what is true. Indeed, as Myers argues, James sometimes convinced himself that there is no important difference between accepting propositions whose consequences have been verified and accepting propositions whose consequences would be best for our long-term personal and emotional well-being. It was, I suspect, a case of being blinded by his own eloquence. Finding that he could craft smooth formulas which applied both to the doctrine that verified beliefs are true and to the doctrine that beliefs leading to better lives are true, he lost sight of the differences between them. How, you might wonder, could any formula fit two such different notions? Here are a pair of examples quoted by Myers:

Any idea that helps us to deal, whether practically or intellectually, with either the reality or its belongings, that doesn't entangle our progress in frustrations, that fits, in fact, and adapts our life to the reality's whole setting, will agree [with reality] sufficiently to meet the requirement. It will hold true of that reality.

Let me now say only this, that truth is one species of good, and not, as is usually supposed, a category distinct from good, and co-ordinate with it. The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief. . . . Surely you must admit this, that if there were no good for life in true ideas. . . then the current notion that truth is divine and precious, and its pursuit a duty; could never have grown up or become a dogma. . . . "What would be better for us to believe?" That sounds very like a definition of truth. It comes very near to saying "what we ought to believe" and in that definition none of you would find any oddity. Ought we ever not to believe what is better for us to believe? And can we then keep the notion of what is better for us, and what is true for us, permanently apart? Pragmatism says no, and I fully agree with her.

These rhetorically elegant, philosophically elusive passages capture the spirit of James's philosophical writing, a spirit that is very much present in the pages of Myers's book. Myers's

criticism, like James's, is graceful and courteous. His expositions are leisurely, loosely structured, occasionally repetitious and rarely crystal clear. It is, one suspects, the sort of book that James himself would have liked enormously.

Graham Bird has written a very different sort of book, designed for a different audience. It offers expositions of James's central philosophical views, comparing and contrasting them to those of more contemporary thinkers, including Russell, Wittgenstein, Austin, Quine, Grice, Davidson, Parfit and others. Much of the exposition is solid and helpful, particularly when references to recent thinkers are kept to a minimum. When discussion of contemporary writers is centre stage, the book is much less satisfying. Their views are too complex to do them justice – much less criticize them – in the few pages available.

The James in Bird's portrait is a more consistent and systematic thinker, and a much less colourful man, than the James conjured by Myers. In part, no doubt, this is a consequence of the limited range of topics Bird discusses. But I suspect that Bird was looking for a consistent philosopher, while Myers was prepared to take what he found. It is, however, unfair to compare the two volumes, since they differ so drastically in scope and aspirations – not to mention sheer bulk. Bird's book is a useful one for the philosophically sophisticated reader who wants an overview of James's philosophy.

William James's influence on the development of religious thought is considered in Wayne Proudfoot's *Religious Experience* (1985), which has recently been reissued in paperback (263pp. University of California Press. \$8.95. 0 520 06128 4). Focusing on different topics in the analysis of religious experience, Proudfoot pays special attention to James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (though widely read, "its significance for contemporary issues in the philosophy of religion has often been overlooked"), and to Schleiermacher's *On Religion*.

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Imagining Australia

Murray Bail

Australia began its existence as a fabled continent. For more than a thousand years the very best armchair-travellers in the Northern Hemisphere reasoned, or rather, imagined Australia into existence, expanding and contracting it, shifting it about in the longitude and latitude of their minds, giving it hopeful names - never has a country been given so many names! - and fabulous inhabitants, until the first European finally stepped ashore in 1606. To the Greeks something big must have been down there to balance the land-mass of the Northern Hemisphere; a "counter-earth" fitted their musical notions of symmetry. A Pythagorean, or even the master himself, described the earth as "ball-shaped" and "inhabited round about", and declared that "there are also Antipodes, and our down is their up". Plato has Timaeus imagine such a place beyond Atlantis. Aristotle seems to be more specific. A temperate tract must certainly be in the Southern Hemisphere to correspond with the northern, and that was the line taken by the Stoics. Eratosthenes in the third century BC accepted Antipodes, though he wasn't sure it could be "lit up". Plutarch and others followed.

Not to believe in a *Terra Australis* became positively unGreek. And if there was a South Land it followed it was inhabited, for Nature does nothing in vain. The mathematician Hipparchus described the inhabitants as Antichthonians, though the small problem of the heat of the intervening Torrid Zone made them - according to the Roman Geographers, Mela and Pliny - inaccessible. Only Lucretius seems to have found the whole idea ludicrous. He couldn't imagine the Antipodes walking about head downwards without tumbling into the lower sky. And that "when they see the sun we behold the stars at night". But Lucretius was only a poet. By the second century AD a South-

ern Continent was given timmer though invisible ships by the speculations of geographers, astronomers and brooding astrumancers, notably Cicero and Strabo. Ptolemy joined it on to Africa and Asia.

So it remained, somewhere down there below Marco Polo alluded to its existence after reaching the East Indies in the thirteenth century. And as more and more mariners were blown off course, and more land below the Equator became known, *Terra Australis* was progressively pushed down to join the Antarctic, where in a printed map of 1483 it looks like a huge lump of elongated Tasmania, and as a sure indication of the uncertainty its name had become longer: *Temperata Antipodum Nubis Incognita*. As late as 1570 in a popular world-map by Ortelius, the South Land, now called *Terra Australis nonium cognita*, is still glued to the ice-cap, and has acquired an immense, world-girdling breadth to balance the northern land-mass.

Between these two fictions, an intriguing inscription had appeared around 1523 on the terrestrial globe of a Dutch geographer, Johannes Schöner: "The southern continent recently discovered but not yet fully known." And twenty years later in one of the "Dieppe" manuscript maps of Jean Rotz the mind-exhausting shoreline of northern Australia - here called "Java the Great" - makes its appearance in the correct position and in surprising detail. It is not all coincidence that the golden age of French and Dutch cartography coincided with the first evidence of European contact with the fabled Continent.

But was *Terra Australis non terra firma*? Had "Australia" finally been discovered?

When it first appeared on a map, in 1605, the name "Australia" was assigned to one of the islands of the New Hebrides. And some eighty years after the explicit Rotz map, on June 29, 1628, we find Peter Paul Rubens, very much a man of the world, discovering Australia. Re-

fore leaving for Madrid to negotiate a truce between England and Spain (where he met Velázquez who would 300 years later darken an entire school of Australian painting) Rubens wrote to a friend: "I have heard on a good authority, but in secret and great confidence, the positive report that [the Dutch] have discovered *ultra Tropicum versus Austrum*, a great country, not to say, new world." The diplomat then went overboard, "This will be a memorable thing in our time."

These excited whisperings were like the incomplete lines on the map: scratching the surface. Another 150 years would pass before the South Land became fact, and even then it would remain a source of endless fiction.

It was perhaps strange, or proof of the difficulty to see beyond what was firm underfoot, that once those marvellous armchair-travellers in the Northern Hemisphere agreed on a Southern Continent, and that it was inhabited, they were unable then to leapfrog back, as it were, and people it with figures more or less as ordinary as themselves. In the face of darkness land was land, but the invisible Antipodeans were imagined as outlandish freaks. The reassuring "artist's impression" of pine-trees, castles and half-naked men with bows and arrows in one sixteenth-century map of what is now Arnhem Land suggests only that Gombhric's law of environmental transference can be applied to the visual imagination. The uncharted space of the Southern Hemisphere and the stubborn suggestion of something big down there beckoned writers to embark on imaginary voyages; and the reader could be expected to encounter the strangest animals, vegetables and minerals.

In the first reference to "Australia" in fiction Apuleius in his novel *The Golden Ass* (before AD 197) writes of Antichthonians, who are accessible at least to witches. To the influential medieval theologian St Isidore of Seville it was

Continued on page 1330

In brief

The intriguing question of how the Soviet media would treat the award of the Nobel Prize to the émigré Joseph Brodsky (the awards to both Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn were denounced) was answered last week. A statement from the news agency Tass introduced the subject obliquely by announcing that a selection of poems by Brodsky was scheduled for publication in the literary journal *Novy Mir*. "This publication has nothing to do with the prize given to the poet by the Swedish Academy", declared Tass baldly. The magazine's poetry editor, Oleg Chukhontsev, was allowed to be more glib. "When we sent his poems to be typeset, our only aim was to represent all the significant aspects of poetry today. It is impossible to imagine modern poetry without Joseph Brodsky." During a meeting in New York, Brodsky apparently told Chukhontsev that his award would encourage interest in Russian poetry in the West.

It is the first time since the 1920s that the work of a living émigré has been published in the Soviet Union (although the announcement avoided actually stating that Brodsky has lived abroad these last fifteen years). But the latest affirmation of openness has already run into trouble: contrary to Tass's claim that agreement had been reached on the selection of poems to be published, Brodsky is in fact unhappy with it, and wants it changed.

The first ever National Theatre production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* opened at the Lyttelton on November 25 (it will be reviewed in next week's *TLS*) using a revised text based on the author's own Schiller Theatre production and the 1984 production by the San Quentin Drama Workshop. Textual emendations have, in fact, been a feature of *Godot* productions ever since the play was first performed in London in 1955. The Lord Chamberlain's blue pencil was then still suspended like the Sword of Damocles over the commercial theatre and to avoid it the play was put on at the Arts Theatre, which, since it was a private club, was beyond his jurisdiction. Its success there encouraged a transfer to the Criterion in Piccadilly Circus. This let the Lord Chamberlain loose and, sure enough, he insisted on cuts. Most of them were typical: the substitution of "belched" for "farted", and of "backside" for "arse", the deletion of "erection", "pubis" and "piss". Trivial and silly though they seem today, these mutilations were as nothing compared with his later behaviour over *Endgame*, which was banned on the grounds that it was blasphemous.

To its later shame, Faber and Faber decided to publish the bowdlerized and not the original version. Charles Monteith, formerly chairman of Faber, explains, "The reasons for this were purely commercial. In the mid-1950s the orthodox publishing view was that to publish the text of plays was quixotic folly. The only possible market for them, it was thought, consisted of amateur dramatic societies. For a general firm such as Faber to publish them at all was foolish enough but to publish a text which could not be performed without the danger of a police raid was midsummer madness. Moreover, the official climate at that time was aggressively hostile to anything that might be judged obscene and there had been an outbreak of prosecutions. Caution should be the watchword; or so at least it was argued; successfully, inside Faber and Faber."

Beckett, of course, was displeased and insisted - rightly, says Monteith - that all copies should contain a note at the beginning making it clear that the text was a mutilated one, but apart from that he was forbearing and forgiving. "I fully appreciate," he wrote to Monteith in 1957 when he had completed *All That Fall*, "the difficult position you were in last year with the publication of *Godot* - n'en parlons plus. Perhaps some day you may print the complete version." They did, of course, and next year will publish the revised version, along with facsimiles of Beckett's own directorial notes.

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Letters

'Life: A User's Manual'

Sir, - Soon David Bellos will be revealing that I once borrowed a fiver from him and never gave it back. But I'm afraid none of these diversionary tactics will get rid of the evidence as I presented it in my last letter (November 13-19): his English version of Georges Perec's *La Vie mode d'emploi* is badly translated and badly edited. I can assure both him and his editors that I would much rather have praised the book than condemned it, for obvious reasons.

Bellos now acknowledges that I have found "three of the book's many mistakes", which he says he is in the process of putting right. By this he presumably means "Maggiora" for "Maggiora", the table on the table, and "flaunt" for "flout". I would have thought that any translator and editor who let those three into print deserved to have applied to them the epithet "careless". But Bellos does not seem able to understand that it is not a question of correcting an error here or there, but of the whole texture of the book in English. A single absurdity, like "the artist flaunting all verisimilitude", or a single clumsiness, like "Boubaker would give her terrible rows", would hardly have caught my attention in a five-hundred page book, and then only to evoke the passing thought that even Homer nods.

I suppose it all has to do with the notion of trust, and the example Bellos spends so many column-inches discussing is a case in point. "Transverse obsolete medieval and oriental weapons" never struck me in *Ulysses*, though now I look at it, it seems hard to know what Joyce could have meant by it. Bellos no doubt has a point when he says he merely transcribed what Joyce had written, though one wonders whether Perec left out the offending word because it wasn't in the French translation or because he didn't feel it meant anything. I am sure there are a number of other cases where what I noted as blunders or infelicities are also the result of Bellos's decision to use existing texts, and he may have been right to do so, though it has given rise to problems. But when from page 1 to page 500 one is constantly being bothered by phrases which seem to make little sense and certainly not to be the kind of English anyone would speak or write, even the most innocent phrase starts to look suspect. However, since Bellos is presumably not going to do anything about "three shoe-boxes full of alpine cards", "woken in a start" and "usually, lifting out a space for living always ends up being a sometimes sticky compromise", because he cannot see anything wrong with them, nothing I say will make him grasp the nature of my criticism.

GABRIEL IOSIPOVICI
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The Baader-Meinhof Group

Sir, - The Baader-Meinhof Group, Gang, or Complex? As the translator of Stefan Aust's book, may I point out that contrary to Nicolas Walter's claim in his letter to you (November 6-12), your reviewer was perfectly correct in saying that Herr Aust prefers the term "group". *Der Baader-Meinhof Komplex* was indeed the original German title of the book; by "complex", however, the author means not the terrorate themselves, but the entire chain of events and ideas leading up to, and spreading out from, their terrorist activities. That was the significance of the word as applied to the subject of their investigations by the West German authorities, and there is also one brief reference to its ambiguity, precisely the same ambiguity as may exist in English when it is used in a psychological context. But the actual people involved are consistently referred to in the body of the German text as the "group".

As to the question of Red Army Faction or Fraction: as Mr. Walter says, "most English discussion of the subject" employs the former form, and, like him, I initially wondered why one should feel that the aural similarity of two wholly unrelated words must have had something to do with it in the first place. I therefore began translating *Fraction* as "Fraction", only to become less and less convinced, as I proceeded, that "Fraction" was an adequate rendering of a word whose primary Ger-

man meaning is of a political grouping, particularly a parliamentary party. (The usual senses of English "fraction" are rendered into German by *Bruchteil*.) I suppose it is possible that students of left-wing ideologies, even if they have no German, would instantly recognize the political sense of "Fraction" in English, but Aust's book is not solely for them; it is for the interested general reader, so that the expedient of an explanatory footnote on the first appearance of a phrase which was to recur again and again in the following pages did not strike me as appropriate either. Linguistically annoying as it may be, it therefore seemed that for the general reader the phrase "Red Army Faction", as commonly used in English, was preferable. Translators do take the trouble to think these matters out, as the letter from David Bellos printed on the same page as Walter's amply proves.

Finally, Nicolas Walter is quite right in indicating that Jillian Becker's debt is to Aust, rather than vice versa; she handsomely acknowledges his help in the foreword to her *Hilder's Children*. That book, incidentally, ended with the death of Ulrike Meinhof in the middle of the Stammheim trial; the rest of the story can now be found in Stefan Aust's book.

ANTHONY BELL
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A History of Transylvania

Sir, - Ion Ratiu complains (Letters, November 6-12) that the three-volume *Erdélyi Történet* (History of Transylvania), published by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, is the history of the subject "as the Hungarians see it". What else could it be? The question is whether the authors make some effort to present an impartial account. That effort is there for all to see - alas, in Hungarian. Mr. Ratiu implies that the book omits to mention Romanian opposition to Transylvania's union with Hungary in 1867. Would he please look up Volume Three, pages 1503-06, where a very detailed account is given of Romanian and Saxon opposition to the union? Mistakes of this kind make it all the more important to have this indispensable book in English.

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'The House Next Door to Africa'

Sir, - I know that it is not usual for a father to write about a review of a book by his son, but it does seem that a grave injustice has been done to the text, in the account by Anthony Sattin of Denis Hirson's novel *The House Next Door to Africa* (November 13-19). I read, with amazement, that according to the review, the young narrator visited his father, "a prisoner of the State for little more - it seems - than having an enthusiasm for all sorts of books". Part of the tragedy of South Africa lies in the fact that people have been imprisoned for the possession of books, but that was not what Denis said. On page 75 he paints a picture of Johannesburg pylons, and like the poet he is, speaks of "a dusk country that these pylons cover with their shivering steel song, a strip of infertility, a cold frontier". This led to a contrasting image: "My father, according to evidence in court, was among those who blew a few of them up. In the thick of night one keels over slowly before me, flame spewing from under it, dust blinking with sparks. The other pylons stop dead in their tracks, mute, and unknowing."

It is quite remarkable that, in a review that shows such sensitivity to what was written, Mr. Sattin should have missed so crucial a passage. Yet, by virtue of what is said, the text is trivialized. The characters and events in this book, as the dust-cover states, "are drawn from the author's own family", and I can assure your reviewer that the author's father was for indeed in prison for over nine years; for participation in an organization that was accused of destroying pylons. Denis was twelve years old at the time (as he states in the text)

and these were the perceptions of an adolescent. He uses poetic licence in suggesting that I participated directly in blowing up these structures - but he most certainly did not say that a prison sentence was meted out because of "enthusiasm" for books.

Furthermore, there is nothing in the text to suggest that the family saw exile as "the solution to the dilemma faced by whites opposed to apartheid". We chose to come to Britain because I was placed under house arrest, was banned, and, among the many restrictions imposed on me, I could no longer teach in South Africa. Whether we should have stayed under these circumstances is debatable. At the time, we decided that there would be more stability for the family if we left South Africa. We joined thousands of our fellow countrymen, black and white, middle-class and working-class, abroad - and must stay in exile until the régime is changed.

BARUCH HIRSON
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'Tomorrow was War'

Sir, - Sally Laird is right to wonder about the origins of the hearty applause for Boris Vassiliev's *Tomorrow was War* (Commentary, November 6-12), which on the first evening of its brief London tour also played to an otherwise unenthusiastic and unfilled house. In the interval, however, while some of the audience left, some Soviet visitors were briefed by the house management not to miss the final applause, and indeed when the time came this hitherto quiet audience found a second wind. Enthusiasts in the stalls got to their feet in a way rarely seen in London, even at the opera, flowers cascaded from the wings on the self-applauding cast, and some of its female members began to weep with emotion. Finally, Vanessa Redgrave appeared on stage, where she read out a letter from Mrs Gorbachev on the Soviet privilege of presenting a play to such a spiritually cultured people as the English on the eve of the seventieth anniversary of the October Revolution. It now appeared it was the Revolution which had so excited us.

The Lyttelton Theatre went to no little trouble to make the Soviet company welcome, but to allow the stage to be used for extraneous political purposes was irritating and ill judged. In fact, the apotheosis of overdone friendship came right at the beginning of the evening, with the foyer announcements in Russian. Am I wrong in thinking we didn't get a parallel opportunity early this year to test our German, Swedish and Japanese outside the auditorium? My sympathies to any of the Russian actors who felt alienated by the man-from-Mars treatment, also to the bewildered wit in the audience who, as he left, wondered aloud what Denis would write in his next letter to the Taganka.

LESLEY CHAMBERLAIN
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'Women in Love'

Sir, - In a review of Lawrence's *Women in Love*, Lyndall Gordon states (October 16-22) that the "disfaced prologue" for that novel has been known since 1968.

Actually, it had been known five years earlier, having been published in the Spring 1963 issue of *Texas Quarterly*, together with an introduction contributed by me after my lucky discovery of the manuscript in the University of Texas Library.

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Pineal Position

Sir, - Reading my piece on the *Révue des Sciences Humaines* (October 9-15), I was startled to see that Bataille's "migratory eye" had been allowed to wander from a pineal to a penile (sic) position. May I therefore clarify? Neither penile nor penial, but pineal - the location of the so-called third eye and, in the opinion of Descartes, the interface of soul and body.

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Spy Fiction

Sir, - In defending his review of *The Spy Story* (Letters, October 23-29), John Sutherland cites my essay on John Buchan. The quotation is inaccurate and the impression it gives misleading. I write: "If the Jews [in Buchan's novels], unlike the Negroes, were not in all ways inferior, they were most certainly different, and as one of Buchan's American heroes said of one of his Jewish heroes (vulgar Americans could be relied on to voice what polite Englishmen only thought), he simply 'didn't like his race'."

The italicized words, omitted by Sutherland, bear out the point of the preceding paragraph of my essay: that Buchan's novels feature Jewish heroes as well as Jewish villains. I go on to say that Buchan himself abandoned the casual antisemitism of the clubman as soon as Hitlerism appeared on the scene - "when social impediments became fatal disabilities" and "when the conspiracies of the English adventure tale became the realities of German politics".

None of this, as I also said, absolves Buchan's novels (not Buchan himself, as Sutherland's misquotation has it) of antisemitism. But the historical context is important, as is the distinction between two quite different modes of antisemitism.

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Captain FitzRoy

Sir, - It may seem churlish to criticize Neil Curry's interesting poem "Galapagos" (November 13-19) for factual inaccuracy. But poetic licence is not an excuse for calumny. Captain FitzRoy may have been a creationist, but he was not searching the South American coast for evidence to support Genesis. He was a surveyor of genius, and was doing a top-class survey job for the British Admiralty. Any doubling back was to check his findings when they disagreed with existing records. He was always proved right. *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin*, Volume One, edited by Frederick Burkhardt and Sydney Smith, puts FitzRoy's outstanding ability as a surveyor beyond dispute.

FABIENNE SMITH
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Jane Austen

Sir, - In his review of Park Honan's biography of Jane Austen (November 6-12) David Nokes quotes a comment on Highbury: "we might imagine here the rick-burnings and riots that lay just ahead for rural villages". It could well be wisdom after the event that tempts such a reading of *Emma*, but it is nevertheless an interesting fact, not noticed by Jane Austen scholars, that when the "Captain Swing" riots began in Kent in August 1830, and the first of the machine-breakers were brought to trial, it was Sir Edward Knatchbull (1781-1849) who was the presiding magistrate. *The Times* of October 25, 1830, reported that he discharged the rioters with a caution and a three-days' prison sentence, in the hope that "the kindness and moderation evinced this day by the magistrates would be met by a corresponding feeling among the people". It was this same Sir Edward who married Jane Austen's favourite niece Fanny Knight, thus endangering, in her aunt's eyes, her "delicious play of mind".

BERNARD RICHARDS
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Sir, - Jane Austen's nephew and first biographer is normally referred to as "James Edward Austen-Leigh", not "James Austen-Leigh", as in your brief note of Austen-Leigh's *Memoir of Jane Austen* (6-12 November, p.1216). Furthermore, it is not true to say that the *Memoir* has been out of print since 1926; it was printed in 1965 with the Penguin English Library edition of *Persuasion* (E369) in my *A Bibliography of Jane Austen* (1982) and has to the best of my knowledge been permanently available in that form for the last twenty-two years.

DAVID GILSON
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Letters from inside: writing in prison

Ken Smith

Two years ago, thanks to Greater London Arts, I became writer in residence at HM Prison Wormwood Scrubs; two months ago my term ended and the gates closed as definitely and as mysteriously as they had opened. I have a distinct feeling of being "out", and another of being cut off from a job that became an obsession, of contact lost with men I had come to know well.

I worked all over the prison, with many kinds of prisoners, but particularly on the "lifers" wing, where some 250 long-term prisoners live, their crimes a catalogue of murder and mayhem. I worked with men who either wrote, or expressed an interest in doing so. The theory is that, forced into introspection by their surroundings and with time on their hands, many prisoners write. Perhaps only a minority get their feelings out on paper, into poems or songs or stories; but it is a far larger minority than one might imagine. Inside I found quite ordinary men who write poems, who had written them before prison or had begun to write there. Some were occasional writers, others utterly serious. For some, the only experience of poetry was reading from ancient school anthologies; some turned out acres of imitations. Others made anthologies themselves, or kept a commonplace book. Some revisionists kept journals that they wrote only when in prison. Close inspection showed clusters of entities most often made at the beginning of a sentence, the time when introspection is often keenest. For others, the problem lay in how to write a letter from the inside to the out; some men - though educated and articulate - found four sides of a single sheet difficult to fill.

At the beginning people would ask me if I found another Shakespeare yet. I wasn't looking for one, though I might have encountered a Cunct or a Villon. In any case I was defining the job as I was doing it. Writing was what it was about, but communicating defined a more

general problem. Some men wrote merely to fill the time or in hope of fame; for others writing was a way of avoiding their own feelings. Most prisoners said that they didn't want to write about prison, their own circumstances, and at this I stumbled. Here were men unwilling to look at their environment, who saw no poetry at all in the rhyming metaphors of prison speech.

Some wrote long escapist novels in which they lost themselves. Others wrote fantasy. In prison the most popular authors are Michael Moorcock and Stephen King, but tastes are often surprising. Many men are widely read, and obscure corners of literature turn up without regard to fashion or academic or literary respectability. It took a while to discern, with those who persisted, that the narrative they wrote often became a commentary on themselves, recreating what they'd sought to step aside from. For some, the novel began in biography. For others it went purposefully in other directions, sometimes seeking to create another unreal life they might have lived. What their work often lacked was conflict, while they endured in the midst of it. From prison the world soon begins to look like a glossy magazine: characters in fiction were forever walking into well-furnished rooms to sit in comfortable chairs for pleasant conversations. I recall particularly one man's science fiction tale. It began well, though I never knew whether he'd stolen the plot. In it a test pilot of the future takes off from Cape Canaveral in a plane that will break the light barrier. Unfortunately what he and NASA don't know is that the light barrier is the limit of our universe, behind which we're contained; breaking it, he punctures the membrane surrounding our order of being, and wakes up in a small room he can't get out of, beyond which is another and quite alien world inhabited by the gods, who are busy with their work and their power struggles and whose language he does not speak. Their main concern is to repair the hole he has made in the membrane, and discover its cause; no one tells him his role in the proceedings. The tale died there,

he ran out of steam, precisely when he reached his own predicament in the allegory, locked in and unable to communicate with the gods.

Whether or not meagre resources ought to be spent on getting criminals to be more articulate, the fact is that they learn a lot from such discovery of themselves, they have a lot to teach us that we need to know, and most of them come out again. In practice it was often a matter of getting men to recognize the significance of what they'd said or written, that a tale told orally was worth writing down, that a phrase or a memory or a single image might be the beginning of a poem. Getting them to follow through was largely a matter of hope that their enthusiasm would last. In prison, time is broken up abruptly into crowded intervals interspersed with long solitudes; the ambience is harsh, repetitive, and language often vicious. A conversation is invariably interrupted and it's difficult to complete a thought. Cerebral life is hazardous, and the imagination starved. Deeply cynical; the managerial staff are scarcely interested in any stimulus or attention paid to prisoners beyond the deadening routine. They can make life difficult or kill any project. In prison persistence is all.

Recently I watched a performance of Steven Berkoff's *Kan*, given in a classroom in what is bravely called "the college", for a small invited audience of outsiders. Directed by Alan McCormick in the role of visiting teacher, Debbie, the visiting actress, together with Lee and Joe and Paul and Greg and the two Collins, all residents of the lifers' wing, put Berkoff through his paces for two evenings. Seen in the round in a workshop performance it was threatening, dynamic, cathartic. The cast worked as everyone in prison works, with difficulty, through three months of rehearsal time. Lee and Joe were utterly convincing: they were these East End characters, and with their ways and speech and violent lives they articulated Berkoff's intentions in all their paths. The men involved were enlightened, enabled and given hope and insight, but other inmates were not allowed to see the play.

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Their island story

Alan Sykes

In the 100 years between the Centennial and the Bicentennial anniversaries of British settlement in Australia, Australian history has not behaved itself. In 1888 modest men like Sir Henry Parkes forecast an Australian population of 50 million within the next century; optimists thought of 100 million or more. This giant was expected to remain a white, British Australia, linked to the mother country both by "the crimson thread of kinship", and by the more tangible tie of British investment, British markets for Australian primary products, and the defensive screen of the British navy. One of the first acts of the new Commonwealth inaugurated on January 1, 1901, was to establish the white Australia policy, effectively a British Australia policy.

These expectations have not been realized. Some 16 million Australians cluster round the edges of an empty land; Britain no longer provides Australia's investment, Australia's market, or Australia's defences; the "crimson

thread" remains, but immigration policy and above all the rhetoric of immigration have changed. A new multiculturalism is one aspect of a revolution in a complex of associated values, reassessing everything from acceptable dress, or the lack of it, to the status of women, Aborigines and South-East Asian refugees. In the late 1970s, when Australian historians first began to consider the Bicentennial project that has now emerged as *Australians: A Historical Library*, Australian history itself was expanding into new fields and adopting new approaches. Women's history, regional history, urban history, Aboriginal studies were partly an indication of the collapse of the old regime, partly an attack on it. J. W. McCarty prophesied in 1978 that regional history might "fracture beyond repair the assumptions embodied in the general histories".

These new approaches, however, entailed not only a reinterpretation but frequently a condemnation of much of the Australian past, even the relatively recent past. The old belief that inferior races were doomed to extinction died hard and late. Aborigines were not

counted as part of the Australian population until 1971; there were still massacres in the late 1920s, when the white perpetrators were absolved by a Commission of Inquiry. Despite the early enfranchisement of women, frontier society and its mythology served to intensify and perpetuate the traditions of a white, male, British society. Australian nationalists questioned the British connection in favour of an independent republic in the southern seas, but they too accepted and glorified the bush legend, the optimistic forecasts of future development and the white Australia policy. From every point of view, even that of British imperialism, the past century of Australian history has gone wrong in one way or another. The guilt which Charles Wilson identifies in some Australian historians is an extreme reaction, but it is not surprising that Australian history at the Bicentennial is characterized by a certain ambiguity. If the Aborigines are part of Australian history, as they are in both *Australians: A Historical Library* and *The Oxford History of Australia*, does the Bicentennial become a day for the celebration of British settlement, or a "Day of Mourning" for the British invasion, similar to that declared by the Aborigines on the anniversary in 1938?

The move away from conventional political narrative represents an escape from such dilemmas into alternative dimensions. *Australians: A Historical Library* rejects chronological history. The ten volumes, plus a general index, are in two equal parts, "history" and "reference". The history is done in five "slices", essentially a "spatial" approach, examining Australia in particular years, chosen in part just because they are unexceptional. It also displays at times an uneasy pluralism, especially in the first two volumes. *Australians to 1788* coyly points out that "Aboriginal and European histories are not the same... each kind of history stands on its own and satisfies those who believe in its view of the world". So, of course, did the "history" or "myths" of those who dismissed Aboriginal culture, believed inferior peoples were doomed to extinction, and

gave them a helping hand. Without empiricism the "Aryan myth" becomes history as surely as the Aboriginal Dreaming, but the ambivalence in *Australians* is only the obligatory genuflection to the totems. The scholarship is conventional; the real novelty lies in the organization, the "slices".

Of the history volumes, the first, *Australians to 1788*, is likely to have the most immediate impact, if only because the view of the Aborigines as no more than nomadic hunters and gatherers has persisted from Sir Joseph Banks to Charles Wilson. The picture here is of a more complex and differentiated society, relying not simply on what the unmodified land might provide, but on careful management of that land by firing; earthworks to create fish and eel traps, and even the use of narcotics to bring fish to the surface. A wide-ranging network of barter and social relationships enabled the exchange of anything from ochre and shields at regulated meeting places. The use of both spiritual and physical sanctions limited conflict between groups in a vast country where all strangers were potentially dangerous.

Even when regulated and ritualized, however, it was still a society in which violent death was common, disease and injury went untreated, and life was short. This volume is heavily tilted towards a rosy picture of an Aboriginal society "far more happier than we Europeans". The balance of prejudice, as Wilson remarks in *Australia 1788-1988*, has shifted from the blacks to the whites, a shift most evident in calling the landing of 1788 "The Invasion". The greatest gap is a failure to pull together the various hints about the possible rise and fall of the Aboriginal population before 1788, and of possible population pressure at that time. The observation that Aboriginal children were spaced out, and the decline of the population in the face of white settlement, both indicate a society geared towards population control to maintain the balance between population and resources in a static economy. The degree to which such control was neces-

Alan D. Gilbert, K. S. Inglis, Frank Crowley, Peter Spearritt (General Editors): *Australians: A Historical Library*. Eleven volumes. Sydney: Fairfax, Syme and Weldon Associates. \$Aus 695 the set. 0 19 9288 09 8. *Australians* is published outside Australia by Cambridge University Press. It will be available in the UK in January 1988 (£350 the set. 0 521 340 73 X). The following six volumes of the series are reviewed here:

D. J. Mulvaney and J. Peter White (Editors): *Australians to 1788*. 476pp. 0 19 9288 10 1. Alan Atkinson and Marian Arveling (Editors): *Australians: 1838*. 474pp. 0 19 9288 11 X. Graeme Davison, J. W. McCarty and Alison McLear (Editors): *Australians: 1848*. 474pp. 0 19 9288 12 5. J. C. R. Carr and John McQuilton (Editors): *Australians: A Historical Atlas*. 200pp. 0 19 9288 12 8. Graeme Apple, S. G. Foster and Michael McKernan (Editors): *Australians: Events and Places*. 476pp. 0 19 9288 13 6. Graeme Apple, S. G. Foster and Michael McKernan (Editors): *Australians: A Historical Dictionary*. 462pp. 0 19 9288 27 6.

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Jan Bassett: *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Australian History*. 276pp. Oxford University Press. £8.95. 0 19 554322 6. C. M. H. Clark: *A History of Australia*. Volume Six. 522pp. Melbourne University Press. \$Aus 35. 0 522 84352 2. Charles Wilson: *Australia 1788-1988: The creation of a nation*. 274pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £16.95. 0 297 79227 X. Stuart Macintyre: *The Oxford History of Australia*. Volume Four: *The Succeeding Age*. 399pp. Oxford University Press. £22.50. 0 19 534612 1.

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ary and how it was achieved require more discussion than a few scattered paragraphs.

Slips are snapshots in the family album, descriptive but unrelated episodes. The difficulty is to give them coherence and purpose, a difficulty aggravated in the case of *Australians: 1838* by the formlessness of pioneer society itself and the absence of major events other than the Myall Creek massacre to contrast with the endless everyday that is the substance of "history from below". Each episode is interesting in itself, but in chapters like "People Meeting", the succession of them comes close to padding. *Australians: 1888* overcomes this problem by introducing early on a limited set of characters who recur through the book as illustrations of its themes. The shorter chapters are also an advantage, but stronger themes bring their own problems. With the exception of the chapter on "Cities", the section on "Regions" reveals all too clearly the limitations imposed by defining regions by occupation as economic rather than social units. "Labour", as William Lane remarked and as this volume demonstrates in subsequent sections, "is not the end of living; it is but the means." Like family albums, both volumes leave the future of their subjects blank. At the end, questions remain: what happened to Sarah Fairfax who, with her husband John, a bankrupt newspaperman, emigrated in 1838 to find work in the highly competitive publishing industry? Did Thomas Dobson, who arrived in Sydney in 1883 and was still poor and unemployed in 1888, ever find prosperity? A rummage in the *Historical Dictionary* reveals that Fairfax prospered; Dobson vanishes. A brief epilogue at the end of each volume might have been a fairer recognition of natural curiosity.

The reference books are not all as happy either in conception or execution. *The Historical Atlas*, with explanatory text, is an imaginative and ambitious, perhaps too ambitious, undertaking. Much of it is in fact given over to the graphic representation of statistical in-

formation, often brilliantly but sometimes unnecessarily, since a volume of *Historical Statistics* is included in the series. The scope is staggering, covering not only the obvious areas of immigration, population, economic resources, religion, literacy and so on, but war, Depression, rabbits, bushrangers, larrikins, even the most common time for road deaths. It will be of immense value to teachers and students at all levels, and of interest to browsers, but desperately needs some basic maps showing mountains and rivers. A map on early exploration which sets the explorers' routes on a sea-green plain conveys none of the difficulties experienced by the first settlers as they struggled for twenty-five years to cross the Blue Mountains.

The regional maps in *Events and Places* similarly neglect rivers and end abruptly at regional boundaries despite textual references to the importance of river transport and to places outside the region. Both the *Atlas* and *Events and Places* are easily read, the latter providing a train-window flash-past of Australia and Australian history. "Events" has the saddest entry for a former penal colony become nation about to celebrate its Bicentenary, the report of the Costigan Commission in 1984 "that crime permeated all sections of Australian life". Nevertheless, the quality and ease of use of the *Historical Dictionary* raise doubts about the wisdom of producing two distinct books rather than a two-volume dictionary, incorporating the material of *Events and Places* and reducing duplication. The illustrations are more striking for being unusual: political cartoons rather than the usual portraits; Bradman bowling. Carefully selected entries range from the inevitable politicians and industries to morality, racism and flies, as well as such quintessentially Australian characters as "Dad and Dave" and the "Little Boy from Manly". It is necessary to read the entry for Eureka, rather than Lalor, to learn that Peter Lalor lost an arm in the fighting, and how a rebel with a price on his head became a member of the Victorian legislature within a year: Egon Kisch might have deserved a separate heading, but he can be found elsewhere through the index. In both cases the information is there. With reference books there is little room for compromise; they are good if they contain the information sought, useless if they do not. *Australians: A Historical Dictionary* is very good indeed.

Some overlap is to be expected in an undertaking of this magnitude, but the absence of cross-referencing, at least within the reference section, is less understandable. The Australian Inland Mission merits a brief entry in the *Historical Dictionary* and in substance, though not by name, in "Events". Neither entry indicates that there are good maps and a more detailed text in the *Atlas*. *Events and Places* specifically mentions travellers as potential readers, but ignores Bethany and Lobethal, two villages singled out by the *Atlas* in a fine spread on German settlement in South Australia, and easily accessible from Adelaide. In practice, rather than these bulky volumes the migratory might be better suited by *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Australian History*, a truly pocket-sized guide which is still remarkably thorough. The entries are usually shorter, there are fewer politicians, worthies and institutions, but in compensation there are well-chosen entries on Australian phrases from the political "Med, Money and Markets" to Ned Kelly's "Such is life". It also shows what space can be saved by effective cross-referencing.

It is clear from the six volumes to hand that in terms of its objective of writing "for the general reader" with respect but without assuming prior knowledge, *Australians* is a magnificent collective achievement. The "slice" approach is little short of inspired for its purpose, offering "soft" social history, descriptive in an anecdotal style without the need for complex analysis or explanation. The integration of text and illustrations is superb throughout, and if there is little the academic historian can get his teeth into, the whole is still easy, enjoyable and evocative reading. Between them the reference volumes will provide enough information to satisfy the requirements of far more than the general reader.

Another magnificent achievement has also come to an end in time for the Bicentennial, with the publication of the sixth and apparently final volume of Manning Clark's *History of Australia*, covering the years from 1916 to

1935. This project has been going on for so long, undetected by comments on earlier volumes, that there is little new to say. Volume Six is better organized and clearer than the two immediately preceding ones, but it remains vintage Manning Clark in its virtues and vices. There is the same almost interminable repetition, the same difficulty of disentangling either events or Clark's assessment, if any, from the welter of contemporary opinion. Superficially, this volume appears to offer a novel element in the Australian experience, the decline of faith as the First World War "placed God high on the list of missing persons". In practice those classic figures, the "straitener" and the "enlarger" of life, appear in new secular disguises. The former is murdered by multiculturalism in the epilogue. The history is narrative, almost exclusively political and intellectual, but narrative of Clark's own kind, told through personalities almost all of whom still suffer from the now famous fatal flaw or tortured soul. If this is not visible it is only because of the success that some, like Billy Hughes and S. M. Bruce, have in concealing their own private hell.

Labor leaders fare better than most. John Curtin has his private weakness, but gains redemption by overcoming it; James Scullin is overborne by events he can neither control nor comprehend, but no one comes up to expectations. Labor pragmatists are at fault for pursuing votes not visions; visionaries for their failure to provide an alternative to the "bourgeois" ideals of the Nationalists and Liberals, and for their sheer impracticality. No one wins, except perhaps the genius of "Yarraside", who devised the political system of federalism for their own benefit, exploited both Hughes and Lyons, and created from the Anzac legend a "secular religion" of loyalty to Crown and Empire to sustain their position. Sops to the masses in the form of political democracy and material comforts were a small price to pay for continued political control and economic privilege. On what the alternative might be and how it might be achieved Clark is silent. He aspires to "the light on the hill", but can no more see behind it than those who coin such phrases.

Despite the stylization, the twists, turns and inconsistencies, this is still epic history. *The History of Australia* is a history of Western man, Australia's twentieth-century "Kingdom of Nothingness" and "Age of Ruins", a general experience in a particular place. Manning Clark himself is not simply, perhaps hardly at all, an Australian historian of Australia, but a saving remnant of the 1930s, a rationalist visionary who has lost his faith in rationalism. Part of the epic quality derives from the forces that lurk at the edges of his history, "the spirit of the place" or quite simply an implication of Fate, or the Fates, that toy with human aspirations and the flaws of those who seek fame and power. A mythic Australia fills the gap left by the demise of both rationalism and God. Remote from Europe, Australia might have freed herself from Old World prejudices and errors; her Age of Ruins was not inevitable.

The theme is always contrapuntal but at various levels: juxtaposing federation and revolution; Lawson and Deakin, Hughes and the Labor Party, "the people" and the bourgeoisie, Curtin and Menzies, posing a hypothetical alternative between an Australia chained to an imperial past and a bourgeois society, and an Australia liberated to determine her own future, between "the old dead tree and the young tree green", the book's subtitle taken from Henry Lawson's "A Song of the Republic". It is also a literary device highlighting the chance of revolution to create dramatic tension. It works wonderfully well, especially during the crisis of 1929-32 when Scullin's federal Labor ministry was confronted by possible bankruptcy, the revolt of Jack Lang's Labor government in New South Wales, and working-class militancy. But, as always, Clark is forced to retreat. This was not a revolution. In ending in 1935 he has made his *History of Australia* too old. The theme that the *History* has yet to come, *The Australian People*, was all set down. Curtin by Deakin, Chifley by the electorate. Written by the Government, or at more realistically by the electorate again. At each opportunity, the would-be monarch of contemporary urban prosperity

has so far refused to move. The epilogue ends in a message of hope. In a post-Christian, post-Enlightenment world the old constraints have gone, the opportunity is greater than ever.

The villains in this history without heroes are less the bourgeois politicians of the Nationalist and Liberal parties than the vast majority of Australians who have always rejected their visionaries in favour of the Australian dream, a block of land and a house, the materialist mediocrity and philistinism of the Australian suburb. For Manning Clark, as for the vast majority of historians, this dream is inadequate; affluence has eroded the old virtues of the bush. His argument that it demonstrates the petty-bourgeois values of the modern Australian working class is an application of the concept of false consciousness that entangles the Australian "nationalist prophet" in the coils of a tired European theory. The shearer's dream was of good food, a shed in which the pens were polished mahogany and the sheep came pro-washed; of roustabouts who were girls dressed as boys, waltzing in with beer and whisky every hour; of evening dances by the billabong to a German band. It was more bucolic, but not less materialist or less philistine. If there was a rustle in the bush, it was not the pages of *The Brothers Karamazov* being turned.

The difference is myth, the heroic stature accorded to the old bush workers by the historians, art critics, journalists, politicians or even film directors - all advocates of the view that the Aborigines were the victims of wanton white brutality, or even attempted genocide, supported by the British government; that the Australian economy was restricted to primary production in the interests usually of British, but more recently of American, Japanese and even Russian manufacturers; that the Australian worker was enslaved to the greed of British and international banks; and Australian soldiers were sacrificed from Gallipoli to Vietnam in the service of foreign imperialism. They are guilty, among other things, of neglecting and distorting evidence, "confused prejudices", the apologetic obfuscation of Australia's "origins", "nationalist narcissism", and "introverted, xenophobic isolationism". The "revived, narrow-minded Australian nationalism of the 1970s and 1980s... seems to derive from a mixed collection of fanatics and impressionables who are not peculiar to Australia. They are peculiar everywhere." And so on. It is good reading.

Much of it is also good sense, although the definition of pluralism which Wilson finds acceptable - "diversity within a generally accepted framework of institutions and values" - is weak enough to encompass the tyranny of the majority. His excessive concentration on economics, spurious legalism and failure to concentrate sound but scattered remarks on defence, all obscure the basic problem in the idea of an independent alternative Australia, the question of power. British governors, British settlers and British creditors had the power to enforce their view of the situation; Aborigines and the Australian working class shared a common impotence. More than this, the "imperial enslavement" argument is only a specific version of "wage slavery", a recognition that in global terms, it was Australia as a whole that was powerless, both militarily and economically.

This is something that even the most reasonable historians are reluctant to accept. A poor section on defence in *Australians: 1888* argues that Australia's agreement at the Colonial Conference of 1887 to pay a small subsidy in return for British naval protection created a "two-way partnership", and that "the settlement colonies led by Australia had now become an essential part of the economic well-being and security of the British as a world power in the south Pacific". This is a gross exaggeration; Australia had no navy to speak of at the time or for many years afterwards, and lacked the resources and facilities to build one. When Britain ultimately sought assistance to maintain her interests in the region, she signed an alliance with Japan. Australia greeted the alliance with hostility, but in 1914 the Japanese navy assisted with the escort of the first troop convoy to Europe. When, in the next war, Japan became the enemy, and Singapore fell, Australia turned to America. Only if the British forecasts of Australia's population

made at the time of the Centenary had been realized, and combined with extensive industrial development, might the position have been different. In the distant European past, primitive technology made a number of small independent states a possibility, but in the 1980s, as Wilson points out, interdependence is essential. The irony of isolationist nationalism and counter-factual Australian history is that its ideology belongs to Europe's past, not Australia's future.

Judging by these books, looking inward seems almost a reflex action for Australian historians. The foreword to *Australians* presents the collection to "the people of Australia"; the Publisher's Note to the *Oxford History* anticipates that it will be "read and enjoyed by many Australians". Neither shows any concern to interest the rest of the world in Australian history. The "Isolation of Australian History" was the subject of a recent article in *Historical Studies* by Donald Denoon. His objective was to break through "procrustean national boundaries" and establish categories into which Australian history might be fitted, partly as the Australian experience abroad, partly as comparative history. He did not make the provocative point that in the present-day assessment of the decisive events and influences in modern history, Australian history in isolation can be easily ignored. Transportation, immigration, especially Irish immigration, and comparative studies of "capitalist settler societies" attract some outside interest, but hardly bring Australia into the mainstream.

Denoon's suggested procedure also risks running into another of Wilson's targets, "substituting cut-price sociology for history". Moreover, it is unnecessary. For much of Australian history there is, as his examples show, a ready-made historical context for Australian history, that of British imperialism,

or more usefully, British expansion of the Empire. His comment that no one now writes from the perspective of Empire except to study the seamy underside is substantially correct, but the solution is not to erect new, more fashionable-looking alternatives but to attempt to recover the historical experience of those for whom the Empire was a central part of their everyday environment, whether they lived in Australia, or Britain, or for that matter India, Kenya or Trinidad, whether they were British or colonial born, white, brown or black. Sir Edmund Barton's reference in the Australian Commonwealth parliament to France as "our nearest neighbour across the Channel" was less an error of geography than an expression of identity as his generation perceived it.

From this perspective, the isolation of Australian history is as much a loss to British as to Australian history. Wilson, for example, observes that British immigrants brought trade unionism with them, but he misses the central point that the Australian and British labour movements found different solutions to the apparently similar problems that faced them in the 1890s. John Rickard's study *Class and Politics: New South Wales, Victoria and the Early Commonwealth* is Australian history, but it reveals assumptions made by the British Labour movement that go unnoticed by historians because unspoken by contemporaries, not least its reflex rejection of protection and arbitration. Recent changes in Australian attitudes and practice have created for Australia what European countries with longer histories have long possessed, a past distinct from the present. It is best understood not in isolation but in a wider imperial context.

The new element in Australian history, traceable with hindsight to the First World War, is that it is post-colonial, rather than post-Christian or post-Enlightenment. This is

the lesson of Stuart Macintyre's excellent Volume Four of the *Oxford History of Australia*, *The Succeeding Age*, which realistically treats Australian nationalism in the past as history. For Macintyre, Australian nationalism is susceptible of different meanings and political associations, radical and anti-imperial before the First World War, conservative after it, in which form it was integrated into loyalty to the modified post-war Empire/Commonwealth. The urgency of development in the 1920s, especially land settlement, had awareness of Australia's exposed defensive position behind it. That the cost was too high and the loans too many is a reflection of the difficulty of colonizing the desert. Macintyre puts the ambitious forecasts of the Centenary, and the post-1918 myth of "Australia Unlimited", firmly into the context of the possible.

The best aspect of this book, however, is the integration of history from below with high politics, completely vindicating the prefatory rejection of such "spatial" distinctions. This is apparent in his consideration of the working classes and arbitration, and even more in that of the position of women and the family. "Separate spheres" began with attitudes, but found its way into official policy in the Arbitration Court's judgment that a man should have a "family wage", but a woman a single person's wage, and in factory legislation and compulsory education which removed children from the labour market, but extended childhood, and thus motherhood. The transformation of household drudgery into the science of home economics endorsed by experts increased domestic responsibilities, negated the liberating possibilities of labour-saving tools and enhanced the distinction between the private world of the family and the public world of work. While commenting on respectable conformism, of which "separate spheres" was one manifestation, and cen-

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worship another, Macintyre still appreciates, as Manning Clark does not, the insecurity that bred the mentality of the suburbs.

If the *Oxford History of Australia* continues with the standard Macintyre has set, it will become the basic narrative history of Australia, and the complement that *Australians* needs. Macintyre's early descriptive chapters, which make good use of the new areas of research, are highly reminiscent of *Australians*: 1888. The only qualification is that rather more explanation is required in the right place. For example, Macintyre does not explain either the Harvester Judgement or Theodore's monetary proposals until some time after his first references to them; Scullin appears from nowhere as federal Labor leader and Prime Minister, as does Curtin as federal Labor leader in 1935, while the two men whose chat led to the Kyabram movement are never

named, apparently through oversight; the Australian navy bows to the surface as if it had always been ready-formed at the bottom of Sydney Harbour, awaiting the kiss of Alfred Deakin or Andrew Fisher.

Possibly in the light of Patrick O'Farrell's recent and subtle book, *The Irish in Australia*, the Irish influence is understated, with Archbishop Mannix only really appearing in the conception controversy where he is unavoidable. Macintyre finds it necessary to defend his "lapse" into high politics, an indication perhaps of its current standing in Australia. High politics here is in fact more public policy and the social alignments behind party politics than the more usual intrigue of smoke-filled rooms. The book also includes one fine misprint, in describing the "Darwin rebellion" of 1918 when angry workers forced the government to send "a navel vessel" to

rescue the Commonwealth administrator. A man perhaps of Caesarian ambition.

British readers will get most out of this book if they also have some basic knowledge of British history. Macintyre not only sets Australian history within its imperial framework, but on occasion points out the parallels either with Britain, or with white settler societies. Even when he does not, they appear starkly. In both Britain and Australia, the tribulations of the 1890s led to trade-union-based, largely oppositional, pragmatic parliamentary Labour parties; in both countries the party of the left, in office at the outbreak of the First World War, split over the conduct of the war, specifically conscription; in what must surely be pure coincidence, both split parties were led by short, fiery Welshmen, who continued in office in peacetime conditions outnumbered by their former enemies, until they were, almost simul-

taneously, dropped. These and other similarities with differences create from a book on Australian history a commentary on British history that is at once fascinating and enlightening. It is very superior, sophisticated general history.

With awareness of Australia due to be raised by the Bicentennial celebrations, there is an opportunity to reduce if not end the isolation of Australian history, if Australian historians wish to do so. Manning Clark's *History of Australia* is already a classic. Stuart Macintyre's *Succeeding Age and Australians: A Historical Library* incorporate in their respective ways the constructive aspects of the new currents in Australian historiography. Both deserve to be thrust on to a wider stage, as statements not just about Australian history to other Australians, but about Australia to the world.

Clive James

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Not so far in the future, suggests Ian McEwan in his novel *The Child in Time*, Britain hopes to be self-sufficient in wood. With his novel scarcely embarked on its career, McEwan's wheeze about self-sufficiency in wood has already entered the vocabulary of political debate, as a paradigm case of supposed folly: Thatcherite economics reduced to, or revealed as, absurdity. The idea that Australia can be self-sufficient in poetry ought surely by now to have attained the same status, as an example of how not to think about the relationship of literature and nationhood. But the idea goes on looking more plausible instead of less.

In the first place, Australian poetry, regarded as a totality, becomes steadily more rich. Does it need British and American poetry in any more profound sense than Pat Cash needs opponents? In the second place, the British (forget the Americans: this argument has always been about the British) have shown no more understanding, or even simple tolerance, of the Australian achievement in poetry than they did before. Indeed they have shown less. When Evelyn Waugh thought that the very idea of an Australian wine expert was hilarious, Australian wines were already excellent. Now that Auberon Waugh concedes this, do their producers need to feel gratified, or even interested? The endorsement seems as oblique as the condemnation. So why worry about the international status of an Australian poet? Isn't that the very clue to the proven vitality of the arts in Australia - that they at last stopped caring about anything beyond a local reception?

My own view, which I hope is a sane one and not just wishful thinking, is that Australian literature and the literature of the old world - the old world which, from the Australian viewpoint, includes most of what used to be called the new world - are bound in a permanent relationship, if only because the old world is a world elsewhere, and would have to be invoked even if Australia were truly isolated, or the world what it is isolated from? But the relationship never has been, and never can be, based on understanding. Britain (because when we talk about the old world we are still talking principally, if not exclusively, of Britain) can't be persuaded, even if it wanted to be, to appreciate Australian poetry in its full wealth. One of the reasons why Australian poetry has attained its full wealth is that it has learnt to do without outside appreciation. So really it is vain to carp.

In the early 1960s, the much missed British poet-critic Francis Hope pronounced himself unimpressed with an anthology of recent Australian verse. Hope singled out Bruce Dawe for particular disapprobation. So seemingly casual a dismissal was greeted with bitter protests in Australia. As it happens, Hope could not have been more wrong about Dawe, whose originality and solidity should have been apparent to him, especially since Hope himself was an accomplished poet, and no mere onlooker. But suppose Hope had said the right thing: would that have helped Dawe? Isn't it just as likely that such a clear sign of indifference helped arm Dawe for the long struggle, which he has pursued ever since, to please no critical taste except his own? So there is the first thing to say about the uncomprehending British: if an Australian poet truly believes that he is contributing to a self-sufficient national literature, then incomprehension from the British is just what he ought to welcome.

The second thing to say about the uncomprehending British is that they won't be talked out of their indifference by more evidence. As the Australian poets grow older, the British reviewers stay young, succeeding one another in brief generations. Thus there is always a new wave of implacable young critics ready to greet the ageing Australian poet's collected works when a few copies of its latest, augmented version at last complete the long journey by ship, sent back as ballast in partial recompense for some huge consignment of novels by Margaret Drabble. More than twenty years after Francis Hope uncaringly enraged the Australian literary community, Blake Morrison in the *Observer*, reviewing yet another anthology of Australian verse, said, among other things less fatuous, that if the sample it contained of A. D. Hope's poetry was typical, then he (the reviewer) was glad that he had not read any more of it.

At least one reader thought that this was the most clear-out possible test case. Morrison, already a distinguished poet and critic, was the very kind of young British disestablishmentarian writer who was going to be impressed by Australian poetry if anybody was. A. D. Hope was the poet who was going, if anybody was, to impress him. Among Australian writers of any age, sex or stamp, A. D. Hope was, and remains, the unchallenged heavyweight. We quarrel with him; we wonder why he dislikes Hopkins; some of us can't credit that he finds Murphy amusing; but none of us doubts the magnitude of his achievement in poetry - the schooled yet spontaneous, mandarin yet demonic vitality and variety of it. And Blake Morrison had never even heard of it. Well then, let's call off the whole deal.

But the deal was never on. The British - meaning those few, few even among the literary, who are really involved with poetry - nowadays have barely enough time to be concerned with their own poets. They had time to be concerned with Australian poetry only when there was far less of it. Now that Australia has acquired, if it has, a literature of its own as a going concern, the lingering desire to have the mother country sniff its nappy must perforce be given up. Giving up that desire was in fact a precondition of an indigenous culture emerging at all. Everyone realized that - even those who were worried that an Australian literature left to judge itself might prove short of critical talent. These foresaw a great burgeoning of the second-rate. The first-rate had always been there, its inner strength reinforced by scorn of the indifference from abroad. Douglas Stewart, R. D. Fitzgerald, A. D. Hope, James McAuley, Gwen Harwood and Judith Wright had accomplished something beyond the dreams of their senior partner Kenneth Slessor. Slessor's splendid isolation relationship, if only because the old world is a world elsewhere, and would have to be invoked even if Australia were truly isolated, or the world what it is isolated from? But the relationship never has been, and never can be, based on understanding. Britain (because when we talk about the old world we are still talking principally, if not exclusively, of Britain) can't be persuaded, even if it wanted to be, to appreciate Australian poetry in its full wealth. One of the reasons why Australian poetry has attained its full wealth is that it has learnt to do without outside appreciation. So really it is vain to carp.

But the above-named poets who came to prominence in the 1940s and 50s not only created their own variously enduring verse, they created, irreversibly, an Australian literary community in which it might be cherished. One of the reasons why Australian poetry has attained its full wealth is that it has learnt to do without outside appreciation. So really it is vain to carp.



Brendan Hennessy's photograph of Les A. Murray is reproduced from his *An Australian Literary Calendar 1987* (Pascos Publishing).

of Australian literature not just respectable but unchallengeably important. It is essential to note the fact (and to take in its implications) that A. D. Hope's internationalism and cosmopolitanism gave his patriotic concerns their dignity, guaranteeing them against the merest taint of nationalistic fervour. Hope (and from here on, in this survey, the surname stands for the Australian patriarch, not the British prodigy) wasn't just the Pushkin of the emergent Australian literary consciousness in modern times, he was the Belinsky: he was the poet-critic in his most benevolent manifestation. But even though Hope reigns supreme as a poet into old age, he no longer rules as a critic. The forces he helped to release were sure to take their own paths, and one of the paths they took was sure to be nationalistic. Rising with the Whitlam era but lingering long after, a broad school of Australian writing has based itself on the assumption that Australia not only has a history worth bothering about, but that all the history worth bothering about has happened in Australia.

It is only seemingly a paradox that this nationalistic school of writing seems ignorant of the poetic achievement of Hope, Stewart, McAuley, Harwood, Wright and all those other dedicated literary figures who paved the way for it. Nationalism is frequently unhistorical. Awkwardly for those finer spirits who would like to dismiss it in advance, it is also often energetic. Any dispassionate reader browsing along the poetry shelves of a good Australian bookshop at present (there is nowdays usually a whole set of shelves, half of them filled with the glossy output of the University of Queensland Press) will find himself jolted by the force of expression of political views which seem to have been written down just as they were felt, with no intervening period of being thought out or even pondered.

Dating as it does from Gough Whitlam's fall, one would call this strain of verse reportage postlapsarian - if not for its innocence, which is prelapsarian, sometimes to the point that you can see the apple leave Eve's hand and reach itself to the tree of knowledge. At the moment Alan Wearne is the most prominent exponent of the genre. His long verse novel *Nightmarkets*, first published in 1985, is now out in a large-format Penguin. No less a critic than Chris Wallace-Crabbe, himself the author of poems which have earned their permanent place in the anthologies, has hailed Wearne as a prodigy. Certainly he has a voracity for fact. It is easy to see why Wearne is so well in with the editors of *Scrips*, who consider *Nightmarkets* a sure-fire bet to become a "classic of our literature". Its author is so solidly, or anyway heavily, in the tradition of Pound, Williams, Zukofsky, Olson and the yellow pages of the telephone directory. The doings of an author's generation in the bleak years after Whitlam's political demise are treated with a sweep and proximity which will remind you of

John Dos Passos if you can forget Gavin Bantock. The urge to make the book poetic, however, has helped to ensure that it is not enough like prose, so as a novel it makes itself absurd, especially in the dialogue, which is stilted without being heightened.

"Haven't you had enough," Louise cried out "from those nasty shrill petticoat prigs of Women Who Want To Be Women?"

This is a mouthful for Louise to cry out. Saddled with the belief that "credence" and "credibility" mean the same thing, Wearne is not as well equipped as he might be for the precision he aspires to, but he deserves some points for seeing a gap in the market. Australian writing might not have actually needed a Hugh MacDiarmid, but after the Dismissal crisis - which did for the Australian intelligentsia roughly what Culloden did for the Scots - there was room for one: all he had to do was set up shop. Wearne's earlier verse novel *Out Here* (first published in 1976, but now released in Britain) is really far preferable to *Nightmarkets*, if only for being so much shorter. By expanding his scope without increasing the compression of his language, Wearne has lowered the temperature of his work to the level where putative poetry stands revealed as cold rice pudding.

As a chronicle of events, however, *Nightmarkets* is of some interest. The author's urge to mythologize his friends should not be allowed to put the reader off. After all, Les A. Murray, in a surprising number of his excellent poems, mythologizes such crepuscular acquaintances as Bob Ellis, who looms in Murray's work as if he, Ellis, were Marlowe to Murray's Shakespeare. Avowedly pursuing failure with the same determination other men expend on the trail of success, not even Ellis, whose flakily confessional memoirs, *Letters to the Future*, have recently been published in Australia, is quite capable of being entirely uninteresting when recalling the salad days of the poets of his generation. The salads in those days were terrible, and something of their flavour - the lettuce moistened by nothing but beetroot juice, the onions with the same half-life as plutonium - has lingered in Ellis's untreated prose ever since. He has made a career out of complaining about his own capacity to fritter away his talent. Those who have good cause to doubt whether this latter entirely actual exists might be apt to dismiss his memoirs as faint unseem, but they should be advised to entertain the possibility that Ellis might entertain them. Ellis's prose is so hit-and-miss that he can't even beat his breast without hitting himself in the eye, but his reminiscences are - this reviewer can vouch for it - pungently evocative of an epoch, now thirty years gone, when nobody even dreamed of a government subsidy, and to declare himself a writer was a serious commitment, even for a clown. (The previous generation of literary have had their

A local habitation and a name

Peter Porter

PAUL CARTER
The Road to Botany Bay
375pp. Faber. £14.95.
0571145515

If you could hover, God-like, on January 26 next year (Australia Day) above the bountiful estuaries and harbours of the continent of Australia, from the Swan River in the West to Port Douglas, north of Cairns, with Botany Bay and Port Jackson as your hub, you would see, riding at anchor, the most obvious symbols of prosperity and progress, the yachts of the leisured classes on the smooth waters of a tamed littoral. Two hundred years after Governor Phillip's landfall, the Europeans have made the land their own. Not that the scene would differ much from a similar panoramic vi-

sion of Burnham-on-Crouch, St Tropez and Portoferrario - the twentieth century has homogenized the way we live. But in 1988 the Old World will be bringing tributes to this most recently successful part of the New - and the New itself will be responding enthusiastically: a re-enactment of the First Fleet, a spate of conferences for experts, a rash of concerts, poetry readings and dramatic scenes, and a publishing programme of commissioned works with its own form of "milit obstat".

"And grave by grave we civilize the ground", wrote Louis Simpson about America. Australia is a big place: something quicker than the grave will have to be found. It looks as if one civilizing avenue will be the magic carpet of semiotics and theory. Already the young critics and semioticians of Sydney are in teleprinter contact with the latest ideas from Paris, and no Australian university could ever be provincial or obscure enough to resist the fashions of Chicago and Yale. In this book Paul Carter presses a most refined bouquet of theoretical blossoms on to the oldest of Australian canopies, "The Birth of a Nation". *The Road to Botany Bay* is about how the map-makers, navigators, explorers and settlers turned "space into place". Indeed, Carter's book might be described as a fantasy on one note, since "space" and "spatial" occur in almost every paragraph. Thirty pages in, I made a note for my later perusal. "What is spatial history?" Three hundred pages later, I still didn't know, but I had certainly encountered spatial concepts of a bewildering order during my reading. This study is probably intended as a rite of passage, a signal to the rest of the world that Australia has grown up and can be admitted to the company of the serious nations: spatial history has wrestled Imperial history out of the ring, though by Imperial history Carter seems to mean no more than a linear procession of narrative - one thing after another: the discoverers, the convicts, immigration, exploration, moving on to Federation, Nationalism etc.

In Australia itself, *The Road to Botany Bay* seems to have struck a note of recognition among the more internationalist-minded of the country's younger writers, and the jacket carries warm recommendations from David Malouf, Murray Bail and Peter Carey, as fine a triumvirate of present-day Australian taste as you'll find. Malouf's assurance that the book is dazzlingly original and that he couldn't put it down is surprising. Whenever he eschews the theorist jargon, Carter writes elegantly, but his 370 pages of exposition are the hardest jungle of words I have ever had to fight my way through.

Much of what he expounds seems perversely dissonant with common sense, and offuse into the bargain. In his title chapter, for example, Carter relates how convicts run away from Sydney Cove to Botany Bay immediately after the transfer there of the fleet by Governor Phillip in January 1788. Because Botany Bay was the known and named place (Cook's legacy) and thus senior to Sydney Cove in spatial-historical terms, it could be described as Australia's "first other place". Such another place, argues Carter, helped to define Sydney, and he develops several arguments to adorn the aboriginal track which is his "road to Botany Bay", largely in terms of the open-endedness of time

leading both onwards and backwards. This "first other place" is less a brilliant rhetorical trope than its own chimerical other, a redundant truism. Conceiving it illuminates nothing. The convicts were hoping to scramble aboard the ships of La Pérouse's fleet which had arrived at Botany Bay a day or so after the First Fleet landed. They were either sent back or died in the bush, but their quest for the "other" would have proved illusory if they had succeeded, since every man of La Pérouse's squadron subsequently lost his life by shipwreck in the New Hebrides.

Carter pursues several main lines of investigation. First he examines how the Australian coast was named by its European discoverers, particularly Cook and Matthew Flinders; he then describes the way the featureless interior was surveyed and airy nothing gained its local habitation and its name; and further looks into the pioneer settlers' own acclimatization both of themselves to the land, and of the land to them. He concludes with a tribute to the Aborigines, who must have mixed feelings about the bicentenary of a usurpation, and whom he credits with existing spatially in a real sense since they live nomadically.

The business of naming finds Carter at his most inventive and frequently most ridiculous. Much of the detail he presents is interesting: it is the concepts he adorns it with which injure sense itself. Carter doesn't understand that names may not always be given by analogy or association, or even to honour those from whom preferment may fall, but in a purely arbitrary way, and yet stick and be found useful. Nor are pioneers being obsequious in seeking in a new land traditional classifications from the old - what else can they call the phenomena they encounter but hills, mountains, rivers, swamps and the rest? If the English language offered no immediate epithet for some of the creatures and places Europeans encountered in Australia, it is not surprising that names out of stock should have been summoned up on the spot - so we get wattle (for mimosa), magpies for those large black-and-white birds which are cousins to the currawong. Carter is carried away by his great love of words - not a poet's intoxication but a categorizer's. Early on, he announces, "the less there was to see, the greater the necessity to write about it", but fails to apply the nostrum to his own exegesis. For all of his itemized concern for the signs and signifiers of the Australian experience, he can do no more than turn it all into words. The old histories were sentimental as well as linear, but this new version, Carter-style, removes all the detonators. To parody Carter's own sort of paradoxical aphorism, the true road to Botany Bay runs through the Student Seminar.

The sections dealing with Major Mitchell and with Matthew Flinders are more rewarding than the others. Carter makes forays into the travels of the explorers, namely Sturt, Eyre, Stuart, Leichhardt and Stiles. These are the names we learned at school. Australia has no history of battles and kings, and even more endurance rather than victory. But Carter will give her some fallen idols. Major Mitchell's official explorations, and his self-conscious apologetics in naming the Victorian plains "Australia Felix" make him the perfect target

for Carter's late-twentieth-century revisionism. Mitchell was an interesting if pompous ideologue, who certainly travelled mythically as well as purposefully. Carter follows him like a private detective and brings forward some fascinating evidence. Mitchell's descriptions of the country he passed through resemble Marvell's "Instructions to a Painter" - they are propaganda. Mitchell was also emulating Camoens in *The Lusads*, the classic post-Virgilian epic of imperial destiny acted out as a voyage. Mitchell, the very opposite of the naive traveller, is a fair target, and it is affecting to observe that in grappling with him, Carter himself comes alive.

Flinders is more of a hero for Carter. Perhaps he could not find any real ground to quarrel with Flinders over, since Flinders is an exemplary traveller - courageous, industrious, level-headed and possessed of a humane sense of duty more stoic than imperial. Carter has fun relating the names Flinders bestowed on sightings in Spencer Gulf with places in his native Lincolnshire. If more of the theorizing of *The Road to Botany Bay* had been as playful as the section devoted to Flinders, the book would be more gratifying to read.

Carter quotes well from his explorers, diarists, memorialists and versifiers, and it is a pleasant surprise to discover how well these early Australians wrote. Yet, even here, his conclusions from the pioneers' words remain perverse where they are not wholly confusing. Anyone attracted to Carter's chapter on settlement in Gippsland, entitled "Debateable Land", will get far richer rewards from Laurie Duggan's recent topographical poem about the district, *The Ash Range*. There is much else on offer that is interesting - the influence on public and private life of the predominance of grid-plans in the layout of Australian cities; the verticality of flames and trees as home-coming signs ("like a good deed in a naughty world"); the suggestion that the sprawl of modern Australian suburbia repeats in its visual chaos the wildernesses of the Outback. But one keeps on meeting statements which are infuriating in their point-making. In a discussion of the place of the picturesque in accounts of Australia, Carter points to the later Nationalist fondness for restoring Aboriginal names to places previously given European ones. But he goes further: this, he pronounces, "renders the Aborigines tacit conspirators in their own destruction".

Recently I crossed the North-West Coast of Australia in a Boeing 747 at 40,000 feet, the first time I had done so in daylight, and was able to see the land which stretched away below me for hours with no sign of man's presence. It resembled nothing so much as fold on fold of boarding-house blanchmange in shades from chocolate to raspberry to lime. It seemed well beyond the grasp of words. Not Major Mitchell's nor Paul Carter's figures of speech could colonize this territory. Perhaps only facts and common sense will help us understand such a huge country. Next to "Anglo-Saxon" (in Australia, "Anglo-Celt"), there is no word more likely to call up cries of scorn among literary theorists than "common-sense", but *The Road to Botany Bay* shows what happens when those who luxuriate in words dispense with the nimbus of common experience which words carry with them.

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years of growth recorded in the distinguished prose of Donald Horne, whose latest chronicle, *The Lucky Country Revisited*, covers three decades of cultural change with a fastidiousness that never falters.

It should hardly need saying that merely to mention Les A. Murray is to heighten the tone of the discourse. When he is propagandizing for an Australian republic, Murray can be as postlapsarian as anybody — he has written poems about the demise of the British Empire which could have come out of the first draft of the script of *Gullipoli* — but usually his language is too scrupulous to allow for anything less than a fully considered view, especially when it is a view about language itself. Murray when young discovered within himself, and without prompting, a sympathy for other languages. Diligent cultivation of this sympathy gave him the right and the wherewithal to argue powerfully, in his maturity, for the autonomy of the Australian vernacular. Murray's views on the subject are put in his book of essays, *Persistence in Folly* (reviewed in the *TLS*, August 9, 1985 — by Blake Morrison), and they are too subtle to be fairly summarized here, but broadly it can be said that he makes a self-possessed national stance plausible without denying — which, of course, most of the post-lapsarians emphatically do deny — an intimate and inescapable connection with the outside world.

It is a great relief, while recommending Murray's prose, not to feel obliged any longer to recommend his poetry, the battle for international recognition of which may now be considered won. Probably it could not have been lost. The craze for Marianne Moore in Britain might have been specifically calculated to prepare for the advent of an Australian poet who finds that kind of stuff as natural as breathing. Murray's new collection, *The Daylight Moon*, is about to be published in Australia by Angus and Robertson. No doubt, at the proper time, it will be reviewed at length in these pages, but

without jumping the gun it should be permissible to say that an already mature talent now shows signs of maturing further, into the mastery that can leave an effect understated. In "Bats" (Ultrasound) the first four lines of the opening stanza are of a Marianne Moorean quality, but there is a new depth underneath. The really astonishing effect is in its understated last line.

Sleeping-bagged in a duplex wing
with fleas, in rock-cleft or building
rider hats are darkness in miniature,
their whole face one tuftly crinkled ear
with weak eyes, fine teeth bare to sing.

"Fine teeth", already a standard phrase in conversation, is quietly brought back to full life. The whole book is alight with Murray's usual dazzle, but there is a new depth underneath.

Murray's verse has been published in the United States and is by now so well known in serious British poetry magazines that his presence rivals that of Peter Porter, except that Murray works the trick without giving up his absence. Speaking, however, as one who participated, if only marginally, in the campaign to get Murray reviewed decently abroad, I feel free to voice a doubt as to whether this victory, any more than any other, escapes the law of unintended consequences. It only takes one Australian poet making it abroad to revive the idea, both at home and abroad, that making it abroad is the thing to do. While growing no less ready to insist that a British audience will find much to enjoy in Murray's poetry, one should acknowledge a sharpening, perhaps atavistic, urge to point out that he gets a lot of his strength from being so involved with what happens in Australia, and that other poets who have not attained escape velocity have not necessarily failed to do so because they lacked the power. It could be that they just liked the gravity.

The question of what precisely Australian writers have lost or gained by being or not being expatriates has been often discussed without really being debated. But nothing should be allowed to detract from Peter Porter's achievement. His poetry is the embodiment of what drives, or ought to drive, the Australian expatriate writer — a centripetal force which pulls the world together. The Australian expatriate critic need not feel guilty about pointing to Porter's *Collected Poems* (1983) as the best, as well as the most conveniently available, example of what Australian poetry has to offer the world. But the critic is bound to feel guilty about what he doesn't point to. Bruce Dawe is of an age with Peter Porter. His poetry is published only in Australia, and then only in his off-puttingly entitled compendium *Sometimes Gladness: Collected poems 1954-1982*. If the title sounds like Rod McKuen talking, nothing in the book sounds quite like anyone else on earth. Without leaving home, Dawe made a journey into the American language. I remember in the 1950s coming across a poem he wrote about a wrestler called Drop-kick Joe Savoldi. It was clear that Dawe liked the American lilt of that name. It was equally clear that he was not ashamed of liking it. There was no need, Dawe had realized, to go in quest of the golden fleece. The golden fleece would come to him. But it would be made of nylon. Dawe was the first Australian poet to take the measure of the junk media and find the poetry in their paths. He wrote better about the Vietnam war than any other poet, including American poets; and he could do so because he wrote better about television.

Say, are those plumed shadows
Flying Horsemen of the First Air Cavalry Division,
or Britches bringing the gospel of son
to confused the Egyptians?
What are we up to now?

Above all, Dawe had the originality to admit the fact — which should have been obvious, but wasn't until he articulated it — that the saturating, penetrating impact on Australian culture wasn't British, it was American. The British influence is mainly political, and can be outgrown, although the wise will be tactful enough to outgrow it gratefully. The American influence, however, must either be dealt with or succumbed to. Dawe dealt with it. His sense of humour helped. His poetry sounds easy — genuinely funny things always sound easy — and never are — but it represents a feat of strength.

because the Australian language was so much smaller than the American that for the first to absorb the second was like a snake swallowing a donkey.

Dawe consciously assimilated an alien idiom. Younger poets have been able to assimilate the world entire, sometimes without using their brains at all. The sons and daughters of the immigrants have grown up with a houseful of connections to the old world, which cheap air travel has put less than twenty-four hours away. Where Australian poetry was once faced with the dilemma of either being parochial if it defended itself or of losing its identity if it went international, the problem has now disappeared, leaving only the threat of drowning in its solution. The University of Queensland Press seems willing to print any poet in Australia who can't find a commercial publisher. By no coincidence the UQP poets vary widely in quality. Richard Kelly Tipping, in the preface to his collection *Nearer By Far*, tells us that its contents have been "chosen from the high pile of certified verbal artefacts resulting from my 24th to 34th years to heaven". The allusion to Dylan Thomas might not be enough to persuade the reader that Tipping, born in 1949, is impelled by a similar burlesque gift, or any other kind of gift except unmemorable enthusiasm.

& I am a tender siren, bleeding in a tray
in the refrigerated window of time —

Both in name and style, Tipping sounds as if Osbert Lancaster made him up, but the inextinguishable Thomas Shapcott — the Michael Horowitz of the South Pacific — assures us that "Tipping is witty". No such fatal endorsement disfigures the cover of John Blight's *Holiday Sea Sonnets*. Blight was born in 1913 and has spent a lifetime lying so low he has hardly been heard of — an approach to poetry that recalls Ian Fairweather's approach to painting. But if Peter Porter's admiration for Blight sounds excessive, the merest glance at any poem in the book will instantly prove that it is not misplaced. Here is a stranded raft:

A snap decision of the waves
has tossed it at high tide across
the reef.

Punning on a whole phrase is a trick for which Geoffrey Hill has been applauded and the Martians elevated to the status of magicians. It is a crowd-pleasing thing for poetry to do, but for a long time Blight has been doing it far from any crowds at all, and one might almost say that such a knack was fundamental to Australian poetry. One says "almost" because in Australia, as elsewhere, most of the poets have no verbal characteristics whatsoever. Thomas Shapcott, the demigod of the UQP phalanx, can't. I think, he said to write poetry in any way that distinguishes it from prose chopped up. But his range of artistic reference is fully extended into space and time, as if Michael Kustow had met Dr Who. Shapcott's latest collection, *Travel Dice*, reveals, among many other things, that he has been in Belgrade; that he has stood in awe of Piero di Cosimo, Titian and Goya; and that he can't

spell Davy Crockett but is willing to try. Like all the UQP poets rolled together only more so, he sees nothing wrong with trying to get it all in. To that end, of course, lack of a specific poetic talent can be a positive help, and if there is no particular gift for prose either then the pen can just fly along, because while not everything looks like a prose sentence, anything can pass for a line of verse.

Time spat a capsule of saliva.
It was a plane shining in rare atmosphere.
Now it has landed.

The UQP enterprise is doing its considerable best to put poetry on an industrial basis, rather like Faber in Britain, and so far with a similar exemption from the sceptical heckle. On the whole it is probably better for poets to think of themselves as industrialists than as artists — it is better for them to think of themselves as almost anything than as artists — but when the hard-nosed, high-productivity, *Sinkhanovite* attitude towards grinding the stuff out is accompanied by vociferous claims to a government grant, the resulting picture of subsidized careerism is not attractive. Reminders that Australian poets once had to look after themselves, and profited from the solitude, are always useful.

Such aids to memory can be found in the anthologies, where poets not generally acclaimed can be found to have done excellent particular things — ie, poems. First the poems, and then in the course of time, the poet: that is the desirable order, which ambition will always try to reverse. In *Australian Poetry 1986*, edited by Vivian Smith, Philip Hodgins has a Martians-move-over poem about a dam: "Two ibises stood on the rim like taps". Mr Hodgins sounds like the sort of poet who is content to wait, both for the right idea and for eventual fame. In the *Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets*, Gwen Harwood is the outstanding example of a poet who has gradually attained the first magnitude in her art without ever having had a perceptible career. She has been a miracle of self-effacement: compared with Harwood, Judith Wright is Anna Akhmatova. In the long term, however, intensity must out. Edited with a lethally po-faced feminist introduction by Susan Hampton and Kate Llewellyn, this anthology is nevertheless a gold-mine, mainly because so many intelligent Australian women have written good poems without having had time to be poets. Such, indeed, is one of Harwood's continuing themes, which she discovered early in her precociously accomplished preface years, and has gone on elaborating into old age. She was a feminist of the new school while the old school was still current. She never needed, however, to raise her voice, which has always deployed itself in the quiet, effortlessly attention-getting range between Blossom Dearie seated at the piano and Mary Stuart kneeling at the block.

Baby, I'm sick to death,
but I can't die. You do
the songs, you've got the breath.
Give them the old soft shoe.
Put on a lovely show.
Put on your wig and go.

Canberra

Ah, but it is capital to be here, dozing
Through a dream city, verdantly inside-out.
Rural in the middle but not a whit amazing.
Where the wire-mesh in-tray handles grief and doubt.

Spruces and English elms, pansies, asters,
The town deployed like a classical symphony
Over which the insufficiently mad ministers
Are planning to unfuck the economy.

They are building a new zoo for the hawks and peacocks:
A stadium, if you like, of marathon tongues
Lashing statesmanly wisdom from the rocks.

Ah, how daggly this pumped-up village became,
Griffin's part-flooded map with Cloud Cuckoo hungs,
Such volumes of beer and paper defining the game.

CHRIS WALLACE CRABBE

All of Harwood's poetry moves and sings with that deceptively simple formal elegance. Younger poets — and I do not exclude Les Murray, who has so forgotten his early stanzaic neatness that when he now attempts Burnian metres they limp as if shot — would do well to wonder how she does it. A. D. Hope has always praised Harwood as an equal. Some of us have been too slow to realize the rightness of that judgment, dazzled as we were by her lack of fame. Getting the measure of a talent like hers is made easier by Angus and Robertson's Modern Poets series, which first devoted one of its paperbacks to her selected poems in 1975. These little volumes are the best available introduction to Australian poetry, which has so expanded as a field of study that the visitor, with the best will in the world, might be honestly puzzled about how to find a way in. One wouldn't want to suggest that all of this critical busyness, even at its most painfully academic, is a waste of time. Some of the not-so-modern poets whose lifetime achievements added up to something too slim for a Modern Poets volume are still well worth studying, both for their works and for the implications of their careers, which were often difficult and sometimes heroic. Lex Banning's *There Was a Crooked Man*, edited by Richard Appleton and Alex Galloway (100pp. Sirius, Aus\$12.95. 0 207 15459 7), is an indispensable volume for anyone who admired his poetry when it was coming out in Sydney in the 1950s.

Banning was a spastic, so cruelly stricken that it took him an age to get out a sentence, but when he was holding court in Lorenzini's wine-bar he was never heard to say anything that was not worth the long wait. "Your poem has a sort of irrational logic", a critic once said to him, adding: "I suppose that's a bad way of describing it." Banning's answer took almost a minute to emerge: "It's a bad way of describing logic."

Banning was condemned to bohemianism — he wanted a normal life. His acutely intelligent verse, little though there is of it, raises all the questions about how urbanity in Australian poetry has to be brought about by an act of will. But there is no use supposing that Banning will be considered more than a minor figure by the outsider who is trying to take a general view of Australian poetry. Larger claims can and have been made for David Campbell. A collection of essays, *A Tribute to David Campbell*, has just come out. Well edited by Harry Heseltine, if vilely set on what must have been a hard press once dropped, with unnecessary violence, to partisans in Yugoslavia, this post-

humous Festschrift leaves no room for doubt that Campbell's attempt to remain obscure was doomed to failure. He was widely admired, and from his *Selected Verse* (168pp. Angus and Robertson, Aus\$8.95. 0 207 13532 0) you can see why, although it is hard to suppress the suspicion that in his case a small pocketable volume is just the right size, because he was repetitive, and too often content to be dilute. He was a gentleman and an amateur.

The Australian old masters have traditionally been more serious than that. What the old masters now need, and have not got, is a form of publication befitting their stature. Kenneth Slessor's Modern Poets paperback (160pp. Angus and Robertson, Aus\$7.95. 0 207 15820 7), for example, gives his essence, but everything it leaves out is essential too. Slessor needs a single-volume Pléiade-style thin-paper Collected Works which would contain his poetry, his light verse, his critical prose and his war diaries. These last are currently available as a single volume, *The War Diaries of Kenneth Slessor*, edited by Clement Semmler (623pp. University of Queensland Press, £25. 0 7022 18790 0), but it is a hefty, overblown production whose insane initial price ensured its arrival in the remainder shops by the direct route from the warehouse. A properly organized national publishing venture would resolve such anomalies.

Who should be Pléiadized, and who not, would be a question guaranteed to arouse heated answers, as it does in France. The only good reason for not putting out A. D. Hope or Judith Wright in a standard set straight away is that they are still productive. Judith Wright's *Collected Poems* (310pp. Angus and Robertson, Aus\$10.95. 0 207 13219 4), while not to be foregone, is so far from representing the culmination of her achievement that it might with more truth be said to mark the end of her first phase. She has brought out several volumes since, and the fate of the latest one, *Phantom Dwelling*, exemplifies the condition of the major Australian poets in the twentieth century. It was published in Britain in 1985 and sank like a stone, with scarcely a single review, even an unfavourable one. For things to have been otherwise, there would have had to be justice. But as with any other product, there is no innate justice in the marketing and consumption of poetry. The point was put more simply by Talleyrand: he who is absent is wrong. There were too many home-grown Martians for an offshore Martian to get a look in, especially when she could do so many other things as well.

Unanswered questions

Sylvia Lawson

ROSS TERRILL
The Australians: In search of an identity
344pp. Bantam. £12.95.
0 993 010 191

Only twenty years ago, "national identity" was a new phrase in Australia, sharp enough to cut some ice in the cultural-nationalist polemics for the re-establishment of a feature-film industry. It was part of the shiny new vocabulary of the intellectual left, the language that helped vote Whitlam to power in 1972; it had strategic value.

It is still intoned by politicians in need of an excuse, and crops up in complacent liberal rhetoric deployed by old Whitlamites in powerful positions. No one else uses it seriously — except, perhaps, the expatriate who refuses to acknowledge the foreignness of what was once his own country.

I have returned to search for a new Australia bursting from an old skin. I have come to see how much of the past British flavour lingers, and how great the American influences are. . . . And what of social values? Have the civil rights belatedly won by Aboriginals brought them into the mainstream of Australian life? . . . Above all, I am wondering, as I drive into Melbourne under a high wide sky of blue with banks of silver, if Australia can solve its problems. Only she and itself.

That quote is not unfair to the prevailing tone of Ross Terrill's book, which is a sizeable publishing event — a run of 10,000 copies in Australia, with issues in Britain and in the United

States, and free copies given to people travelling first-class on Qantas.

Mr Terrill, a political scientist, went from Melbourne University to Harvard in the mid-1960s; then, he says, he "found it too hard to go back" and became an American citizen. Between 1983 and 1986 he made four quick visits home, touring widely, talking to two former Prime Ministers and the present one, state premiers, successful bureaucrats and writers, publishers, academics, a union leader, a powerful mining magnate and a titled member of the ruling class. He rarely quotes anyone who lacks material or cultural status, and does not acknowledge that he moves on a level of privilege from which he never has to step down, least of all when slumming it on an Aboriginal outstation in Central Australia, dropping in on an inner-city black ghetto, or going back to his home town in East Gippsland to "collect my thoughts". Much of the talk goes on in Sheratons and Hiltons, and he flies everywhere, skimming the country's conflicts as he does the terrain.

The outcome is a tourist's haul of snapshots, very few of them in focus, with stereotypical impressionism on cities and regions, caution on multi-culturalism and Aborigines, and much hedging of bets. The complaints of free-market entrepreneurs get generous space; so do the opponents of Aboriginal land rights, although Terrill does not explain what such rights entail. Claiming friendship with Gough Whitlam, and trading heavily on old new-left credentials from his student years, Terrill nevertheless disparages much that the Whitlam government set in train: anti-discrimination and pro-conservation measures, and state patronage — in a country with almost no tradition of private benevolence.

He also badly underestimates the Aboriginal cultural recovery, which has continued in the teeth of political setbacks and persisting social injustice. He went twice to the Northern Territory, where Aborigines have been re-inventing television and video, for their purposes and ours: but Terrill didn't notice. His Alice Springs anecdotes are set mainly in a restaurant, with adjoining vineyard. There and elsewhere, he gives much colour-supplement detail: "Hawke is a handsome man with a spectacular head of silver hair, large blue eyes, and sensual hands." Other VIPs are noted tackling their steak or flounder, or downing their Orlando Chardonnay. But for all the detail on our leaders, this is no guide to Australian politics, or to any other institution. A very important one, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, is mis-titled in the index.

Terrill cannot probe the contradictions, which his many interviews (or "chats") partially expose; he cannot even properly acknowledge them; he has no clear position from which to speak. But the history most damagingly absent is his own. We never find him changing his mind, back-tracking, reconsidering; nothing happens to him — or nothing he can allow us to see. Perhaps the many descriptive embellishments, worth so little at face value, work to conceal the lies and footshits of an expatriate's unease. Dogged by an awkward presence called "Australia", he tries to buy it off, wrapping up the problems in a smooth question-and-answer pack.

It is good for Australian literature, and for its life in general, that there can be no serious argument about the role of women, which in poetry is at least equal to that of men and can plausibly be thought of as supreme. Australian poetry, in this way and in many others, is a very satisfactory field of creativity. Whether the world should be told, however, is an open question. Perhaps the world should be left to find out for itself. Australian civilization might do better to retain the element of surprise.

There is also the consideration that the Australian expatriate, once the secret is all the way out, will lose his privileged status as a barbarian. It has always been a rewarding role to play. Cavafy evoked an ancient Rome dying of impatience because the barbarians were late. If anything, he understated the case. At present, an Australian expatriate in London or New York has only to mention Proust or Rilke and he is greeted as an avatar, as if Paracelsus had come to town. When Australia is correctly regarded as a nation artistically fertile like any other, and more so than any other nation its size — which it ought to be, considering how free and rich it is — the law of rising expectations will make the expatriate's tent show a bit less of a sure-fire smash hit. There would also be the grim possibility that the British scholars, critics and reviewers finally would start taking Australian poetry seriously, with all the grief, rage, academic apparatus and undignified jockeying for position that that would entail.

A possibility is all it is. By now, achievement can be relied on to outrun understanding — an order of events which is practically the definition of a living culture. Like the Australian cities, where the place to go and the thing to do are nowadays always in the next edition of the guidebook, Australian poetry is currently running miles ahead of anybody's ability to sum it up. The Modern Poets series has done well to include some of the younger talents, among whom it is not absurd to count David Malouf (128pp. Angus and Robertson, Aus\$7.95. 0 207 14108 8), who is in his early fifties but so obviously only half-embarked on his prodigious career that he ranks as a beginner. In Malouf's poems the whole complex theme of Australia's position in regard to the world which supplied its modern population is, if not wrapped up, at least raised up and illuminated.

The nineteen tongues of Europe
migrate to fill a silence, we're digging in for the long wait.

Malouf, like Joseph Brodsky, is a culture-benevolence.

He also badly underestimates the Aboriginal cultural recovery, which has continued in the teeth of political setbacks and persisting social injustice. He went twice to the Northern Territory, where Aborigines have been re-inventing television and video, for their purposes and ours: but Terrill didn't notice. His Alice Springs anecdotes are set mainly in a restaurant, with adjoining vineyard. There and elsewhere, he gives much colour-supplement detail: "Hawke is a handsome man with a spectacular head of silver hair, large blue eyes, and sensual hands." Other VIPs are noted tackling their steak or flounder, or downing their Orlando Chardonnay. But for all the detail on our leaders, this is no guide to Australian politics, or to any other institution. A very important one, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, is mis-titled in the index.

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TIM BONYHADY
The Colonial Image: Australian painting 1800-1880
111pp, with plates, Australian National Gallery/Ellysyd Press, 137-139 Regent Street, Chippendale, Australia 2008
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Australian Colonial Paintings in the Australian National Gallery
271pp, Oxford University Press, £80,
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The oldest continent was the last to arrive in European history, and when that happened Australia seemed to begin the world all over again. There were, accordingly, allegories about the invention of art in this new, harsh place - fables describing how men subdued reality by representing it. One such allegory is a bark painting in the Art Gallery of New South Wales. It shows Wirriah, an ancestor of the Gumatj people, treading tracks through the scorched, ochre desert in quest of pigments - clays and soft stones - which he bequeathed to his descendants for ceremonial use. The aborigine derives the means of his art from the earth: the land depicts itself. But for the invading European, representation could not be home-made. It was imported, and applied to the local reality as an infliction. A painting by Robert Dowling in the Luncheon Art Gallery dramatizes the procedure. His modest allegory is called "Early Efforts - Art in Australia". A gaggle of school children watch a boy at an easel sketch a black man, who poses stoically with spear and boomerang. Of course the nascent artist will not be able to paint what he sees. The black man will either be sentimentalized as a guileless primitive or satirized as a degenerate throwback; by Dowling himself he's treated as an ethnological specimen, embalmed in paint. Dowling painted the Tasmanian aborigines as a mnemonic precaution, because they would soon be extinct, but as far as his art is concerned they are already obsolete: he used European models, and was not even able to get their physical proportions right. A chubby infant in the foreground of his picture idly hacks at a stick; art is another of the white man's weapons, conquering by misrepresentation.

Colonial painting in Australia is a digest of such distortions. The artist comes as a usurper. Benjamin Duterrau, recording George Augustus Robinson's "Conciliation" of the last Tasmanians in 1840 - he lured them into exile on a miserable island in the Bass Strait, where they died off while being retrained as a Christian peasantry - deployed the European grand manner against the refractory new world. Robinson poses with uplifted fingers like an annunciatory angel from a Renaissance picture; but he is let down by his dumpy figure and his floppy hat, while the natives he has supposedly conciliated look sceptical, fingering the beads which they no doubt have to give up or squating among their hounds and wallabies to chew on sticks. The moral heroism Duterrau admired in Robinson cannot make itself at home here. When art conciliated the natives, it did so by dressing them up as Europeans - John Michael Crossland in 1854 painted Namulter, a giving proof of his "progress at civilization" by brandishing a cricket bat, and James Wilson in 1838 made a portrait of a girl called Gunbal in an improvised kangaroo-fur wrap with a bow-ribboned turban on her head and her hair protruding in buns above her ears. This, as Tim Bonyhady drily comments, was not traditional tribal fashion.

Art's campaign against reality, having re-

designed the natives, then advanced to wishful fantasy about the lives of the white settlers. Harden S. Melville in 1850-1 painted a squatter reading a letter from his far-off family. A dewy-eyed dog gazes dolefully at him; the floor is littered with butchered wild-life; an idiotic aborigine with a feathered head-dress which makes him look like Man Friday proudly displays the coin he has received for delivering the mail. If Duterrau's "Conciliation" attempts to acclimatize the history painting down under, Melville tries the same for the Victorian domestic idyll. But the facts must first be revised: as Bonyhady points out, bush huts were cobbled together crudely from bark and slabs; Melville passes off a lumpy as a home by making it implausibly rustic, with a tree trunk as a beam and an open door in the shape of a Gothic arch.

The landscape outside Melville's door also had to be accommodated, or in Duterrau's word conciliated. Art makes by matching, by assigning objects to prototypes; Australian nature could only be comprehended by being classified as a version of European scenery. John Glover, emigrating to Tasmania in 1830, declared himself "delighted" by "the expectation of finding a beautiful new world - new landscapes, new trees, new flowers, new animals, birds, etc". But art is baffled by physical novelty, and what Glover depicted was an old world: a transplanted and incongruous pastoral. His "Castles in Italy", one of the Canberra paintings catalogued by Bonyhady, recalls his Claudian model. He had visited Umbria in 1818; he painted this recollection of it in 1841, ten years after settling in Tasmania. Bonyhady believes it has subtly adapted classicism to the colony: "the trees have something of the openness of eucalypts and the hills have the blondness of many of Glover's Tasmanian landscapes". But gum-trees never writhe and ripple, as the serpentine trunks at Glover's Ottrill do, and Tasmania has no crumbling hilltop ruins, glowing in a honeyed sun. Rather I think that in Tasmania Glover was always painting a dream of Europe. His "Patterdale Landscape with Rainbow" admits its own ironic displacement. Here are the scruffy, straggly truths of the Tasmanian bush - skeletal fallen timber, a mangy paddock, a settler alone with his dog in the wilderness. But Glover has evoked an imaginary, Wordsworthian home by calling the property Patterdale (and it lay, in northern Tasmania, under a migratory peak christened Ben Lomond); the rainbow which bestrides the bereft acreage promises reunion with this world elsewhere.

Glover's paintings find their pretext in English literature: "My Harvest Home" with its lambent hay-bales celebrates nature as a Keatsian granary. Henry Short, who came from England to Melbourne to prospect for gold in 1852, made a habit of such yearning allusions. To "Victorian Happy Home" he

Woop Woop

The backtrack Trebizond of everyone, it is in a disc of star-fish where the lakes are Balatons and the muslin-valenced ladies bring library books to town as if it were no more than six weeks since their husbands died.

Here start the open-shirted young sophisticates whose fathers took the franchise for a new variety of Cola, the ones whose poems and whose gossip-columns are made the more intelligently decadent by their need to tame the capital.

Out of its furnished acres come anecdotes of men with recipes for "rocket-oo-oo-vin" of fossickers in muddy dams laming Irish tunes on one-string fiddles - rumours started here sell beer ten thousand miles from "Truth to Tell".

Juggernauts are planned to pass this very place when six-lane highways from the Bicentennial stride beside the boardings, but the point of all this opening-up must be our doubt that such a life will stay to welcome us.



William Ford's "At the Hanging Rock", 1875, is taken from Tim Bonyhady's *Images in Opposition: Australian Landscape painting 1801-1890* (192pp, Oxford University Press, £29.90, 0 19534502 8).

affixed Byron's line "Fair clime, where every season smiles", and to a picture of Australia's inverse summer - "Colonial Fruits and Flowers in January" - he attached Spenser's description of the Garden of Adonis with its mythic bounty: "There is continual harvest here." His cornucopias of local produce ornately fence off the dangerous wastes beyond: "In Memory of the Lamented Heroes of the Victorian Exploration" lays a table with fruit and flowers attended by flickering butterflies and chubby putti wrestling on the stems of dishes; the cup commemorating Burke, Wills and Gray - who perished returning from their trek across the continent - is scarcely visible among the surfeit. Short paints abundance in order to deny the lethal desert's existence. Behind the banquet table looms a spectral forest, which the grape tendrils twiningly obscure.

Like Short, Eugene von Guérard sought legitimacy for Australian nature in English literature. When in 1866 he issued a lithograph of his painting "North-east View from the Top of Mt Kosciuszko", he added a Byronic tag saluting mountains as temples surpassing the "columns and idol-dwellings [of] Goth or Greek", and the text which glossed his "Fern-tree Gully, Dandenong Ranges, Victoria" laboured to see the place as an arboreal European cathedral, much as Melville had reshaped the squatter's hut into a rough Gothic chapel: the gully was "one of the loveliest cloisters" built by nature, the man-forms qualifying as "columns" with the wind "chanting a thunder-psalm". The metaphors beseech benediction for a world unknown and therefore unhalloved.

The habit of relativistically checking Aus-

tralian sights against antecedents in the north is what makes these paintings so cringingly colonial. The geographer James Bonwick conceded that the Wannon Falls in western Victoria were no Niagara, but allowed them to be "a very respectable cascade... not despicable for a waterfall". Thomas Clark, painting them, registered a mere trickle of water. W. C. Pigeon, the first native-born painter of Australian landscape, still made the Nepean look as if it aspired to resemble the Rhine. The invidious business of comparison lasts at least until 1957, when the heroine of Neville Shute's *On the Beach* takes her American lover for a tour of the hills outside Melbourne, apologizing for the inferiority of the terrain: "I like it here, but then I've never seen anything else. One sort of thinks that everything in England or America must be much better." Dwight condescendently reassures her that "this is good by any standard that you'd like to name".

Art's duty was literally to colonize Australia: to overrule indigenous facts (as Dowling's infant sketcher is already doing), and to see the place as an appendix to the upper hemisphere. The long narrative of aesthetic adjustment, in a society which until recently was encouraged to feel that it was merely camping out on the edge of its vacant, unintelligible continent, can be found in Bernard Smith's *European Vision and the South Pacific* and Robert Hughes's *The Art of Australia*. Tim Bonyhady's books - whose images and commentary overlap, though one is a scholarly catalogue and the other a glossy album - record the process impartially, and pass no judgments. By comparison with cultural historians like Smith and Hughes, Bonyhady is a compiler of footnotes.

Although an ancient and austere referent it is younger than the harboured megalopolis it backs, since every journey to simplicity is inland and the parrots dress in ever-brighter greens and scarlets the emptier the lakes they lap.

The movie industry could not exist without it: wasp-waisted girls are seen riding after Schumann to the soup-tin letter-box to hear that London wants their novels, and following riots in Europe, amuse their company just naming its odd name.

PETER PORTER

Defending Emma

Stephen Bann

MARIO VARGAS LLOSA
The Perpetual Orgy
Translated by Helen Lane
240pp, Faber, £9.95,
0571 145507
JEAN-PAUL SARTRE
The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert 1821-1857
Volume Two
Translated by Carol Cosman
435pp, University of Chicago Press, £21.95,
026735109

The American critic W. J. T. Mitchell has recently observed that we are living in a "golden age of criticism". While the heady tide of theory mounts in the universities of Europe and America, the type of literature that used to be called "imaginative" has migrated to the peripheries of empire: such territories as South Africa, Australia and South America are now notable for their production of novels, poems, plays and films. Perhaps this situation is what gives Mario Vargas Llosa's study of Flaubert its particular charm. Here is a Latin American novelist explaining what Flaubert means to him. The tools are often the customary tools of criticism, but the perspective from which the first modern novelist is viewed is at the same time broader and more oblique than we might have expected.

This is in part because Vargas Llosa enables us to glimpse his personal history through the chinks of the critical study. The first part of the book is indeed a detailed account of the development of his "Unrequited Passion" for Madame Bovary. He first came across her in the cinematic guise of Jennifer Jones, on a "stifling-hot summer night" in 1952. His second sighting was at the University of San Marcos, in Lima, when a French critic's "impassive" consideration of the centenary of the novel was violently interrupted by a student demonstration in favour of the Algerian revolution. But he finally bought the novel only in 1959, on his first arrival in Paris as a penniless student. It was then, "in a tiny room in the Hôtel Wetter, near the Musée Cluny", that the affair really began.

How did Vargas Llosa initially express his devotion to Emma Bovary and her creator? It is certainly evident that he read a great deal of

Flaubert criticism of the more traditional sort, at a time when the parting of the ways between *nouvelle critique* and its opponents had not yet taken place. *The Perpetual Orgy* is richly stuffed, especially in its middle sections, with details which he has gleaned from innumerable source studies of the immediate post-war period. There is, for example, a sympathetic re-enactment of Jean Pommier's study of the "Loursel affair" - "which brought before the bar of justice a man accused of having murdered his wife and a maid-servant so as to marry the woman he loved: a certain Esther de Bovary". A good deal more of this kind is added, as the name "Bovary", in all its possible variants, is tracked through the small print of nineteenth-century newspapers, even coming to rest at one point in Flaubert's maternal ancestry with a certain Anne de Boveri.

This Flaubert criticism of the old style forms a kind of sedimentary layer to Vargas Llosa's study. In its cheerful mixture of the categories of life and art, it doubtless recalls the author's own oddly assorted passions during the period. A Bolivian friend is reported as having told him, in late 1960: "You won't give an inch when it comes to Cuba or Flaubert." But Vargas Llosa has also lived through the rise of *nouvelle critique*, and the *nouveau roman*. He has seen his cherished Flaubert become the mascot of a group that took objectivity and neutral description as its watchwords, seemingly blind to the other aspects of his achievement. He has stood by while the heroes of fiction have been "shorn of all moral, historical, psychological grandeur", culminating in their ultimate deterioration in the works of Samuel Beckett, Nathalie Sarraute, or, "going further still, in the novels of a Philippe Sollers". Though he can see the germ of this process in Flaubert's written opinions, Vargas Llosa is willing to defend *Madame Bovary* to the last breath from the charge of beginning the rot.

It is this secondary line of defence that produces some of the most interesting ideas in this study. Vargas Llosa shows that he has learned from *nouvelle critique* to look closely at the features of Flaubert's style, and his sections on the "Four Times" of the novel and the various styles of narration are remarkably full and fine. None the less, this is a work which was originally published in 1974. Since that date, structuralists and post-structuralists have published

outstanding work on Flaubert. Sollers has begun to write novels displaying characters, rather than a mere "murmur of words". And we hardly need telling that the "stuffed parrot" that had served Flaubert as a model for *Un Coeur simple* is not as simple as all that. Vargas Llosa's study can be recommended as a good, though not indispensable guide to Flaubert. What makes it really invaluable, however, is the way it allows us to observe the strategies of literary criticism operating within a distinctive personal and historical context.

Vargas Llosa had before him the example of Sartre, who published in the early 1970s a biography of the writer which was both interminably long and (by general consent) a failure. Yet *The Family Idiot* is an enthralling

interesting failure. Unlike Helen Lane, who had Vargas Llosa's lively and brilliant prose to respond to in her excellent translation, Carol Cosman has Sartre's deliberately loose and unpunctuated discourse to cope with. The division of the original French text into more manageable volumes has produced some anomalies, and the present book is only the first part of the original second volume, ending rather oddly with Sartre's protracted speculations on the relationship of Flaubert to Alfred Le Poittevin. Nevertheless, the edition will be complete eventually, and Sartre's ruminations on the bourgeois family will be available in this handsome English version, which, however, could well have benefited from the addition of an index.

Surrender to the spoiling

David Coward

CLAUDE ROY
L'Ami lointain
175pp, Paris: Gallimard, 68fr,
207070873 X

The friend is Stefan Stein, a German Jew who escapes the Nazi purges of the 1930s only to die, nearly fifty years on, at the hands of the Argentinian military junta, after a lifetime spent defending justice and law in a world which has little use for either. Etienne Archambaud, separated from him both by distance and history, remains in his provincial backwater, dominated by his mother and bullied by his brother, a victim of "other people's rhythms" and of his own rueful docility. Stefan, impelled by events, leaps from one frying-pan into another frying-pan but cannot avoid the fire. Etienne does not even jump, but the smoke brings tears to his eyes - not just for the waste but for man's eternal vulnerability to the unstoppable barbarism of it all.

For these parallel lives are the same life, just as all wars are the same war. Etienne remembers the fighting games he played as a boy and is unable to tell them apart from the religious massacres of the sixteenth century or the holocausts of the twentieth. Stefan faces his trials with courage and lucidity. Etienne, untested, worries about his own insurmountable meekness: is it genuine tolerance or merely indifference? What he admires in his friend is his pas-

sionate calm, a capacity for that "colère objective" which is also both the strength and weakness of Claude Roy's writing, where the oblique suggestion is preferred to the frontal attack. He does not convey the brutality of Stefan's fate through harrowing descriptions of murder and torture but captures it lucidly, poetically, in one intensely vivid incident which shows Stefan and a school friend, at the age of fourteen, humiliated on a river-bank by two blond louts who bear a sinister resemblance to Laurel and Hardy.

Roy is a master of echoes and parallels and reverberations which bind his story into a lament both for friendship and the human condition. A long life and a close involvement in the major traumas of our century have led him to conclude that we are the slaves and not the masters of history. Evil is endemic and, however loud we shout the name of justice and humanity, the cruelties of *Realpolitik* go on bursting the bubble of civilized values. *L'Ami lointain* is a sunset book, an autumnal surrender to the spoiling power of the world. It has all the quiet dignity and telling understatement which are Roy's most engaging qualities as a novelist. It is sometimes said, rather dismissively, that he is simply too nice, that he stands back a shade too far, that he observes (rather as one of his heroes, Marivaux, does) in too passionless a way. In this sober, elegant and elegiac book, he nowhere suggests that the gift of friendship is an adequate compensation for the price Stefan and Etienne have to pay for it. And that is not nice, not nice at all.

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